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What is Literary? Teaching Diverse, Literary Young Adult Novels in the Secondary Classroom

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Honors Thesis

WHAT IS LITERARY? TEACHING DIVERSE, LITERARY YOUNG ADULT
NOVELS IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

by
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ABSTRACT

WHAT IS LITERARY? TEACHING DIVERSE, LITERARY YOUNG ADULT
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Bachelor of Arts

This thesis defines what makes a novel literary and examines the benefits of introducing Young Adult literature into the English curriculum. The current classical canon that is taught in secondary classrooms consists almost entirely of books written by white, Eurocentric men with a few token novels from women, authors of color, or queer authors. While the books in the classical canon have earned their place there, the rapidly changing demographics in our secondary schools mean that the majority of our students no longer share the same characteristics as these authors. They have largely different life experiences and struggle to connect with books that were written by and for white, adult males. Students want books that they can understand, with characters and stories that reflect their own experiences. YA novels have the diversity to provide students with the accessibility and understanding that they want while also containing the literary qualities of complexity and thematic development to fulfill state standards and expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank all of those who supported me so that I could get to this point. First and foremost, I want to thank my thesis committee who were absolutely amazing and provided me with so much support and help. I couldn't have done this without you. I also want to thank my family, who supported me and encouraged me when I was feeling overwhelmed. I also want to thank the teachers at Salem Junior High who provided me with so much research, support, and practical experience that I was able to apply to this thesis. Lastly, I want to thank my friends who sat through hours of me just talking about my thesis so that I could figure out what I wanted to do and how I wanted to write it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

Education is no longer limited to the wealthy, white, male elite. Classroom demographics are vastly different than they were decades ago, but these demographics are not reflected in the literature students are reading.[1] The classic canon supposedly reflects the human experience, but leaves out large chunks of it by only depicting the white, Eurocentric, male experience. There has been a recent push by teachers, students, and other scholars to teach more diverse books in classrooms and to expand the idea of classics. Diverse books are books that represent other groups of people, including people of color, women, the LGBT+ community, non-Western societies and religions, etc. The classics are generally written decades to centuries ago by white European men, with a few women or people of color included in the canon. However, with over 50% of students in the United States being non-white and with about half of the students being not-male, these books do not reflect the students reading them.

There are a number of books written in recent years that allow students to connect with them, are diverse, and still have the literary qualities necessary to teach critical thinking, analysis, and the necessary reading and writing skills. These books capture student attention, relate to student interests, and depict the lived reality of many students. Young Adult (YA) novels are targeted at middle- and high school-aged students and have a much higher chance of keeping student interest, while also maintaining literary merit. Literary merit is a quality found in novels that means the novel makes an impact on the

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[1] National Center for Educational Statistics. "Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools." *Coe - Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools*, May 2021, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cge.

reader, is accessible[2], describes the human experience, and continues to be relatable. Relatability and accessibility refer to the students' ability to read, comprehend, and connect to a text with little teacher influence or interference. A student may be able to read Shakespeare but without a great deal of provided context, the student would not be able to understand the text, making it inaccessible.

An article titled "Young Adult Literature" by Chris Crowe in NCTE's English Journal[3] discusses introducing Young Adult literature in the classroom and its benefits. Crowe's article explains that "great literature deals with serious issues, great literature examines the human condition, and characters—and readers—are most moved when faced with the greatest dilemmas" (125). By this definition, there are a number of YA novels that fit that bill of "great literature." While these definitions have been used to maintain the current canon, they can also be used to justify making changes to the canon, as has been done in the past. Charles Dickens and Jane Austen were considered to be low-brow authors during their time periods, but due to public opinion, subject matter, and trends in publishing, these books have come to be considered classics. Other books published more recently, such as *The Kite Runner* and *The Hunger Games* are beginning to be viewed as classics. Some have shown up on AP tests[4] and they are being taught in schools more and more frequently. Professors Wanda M. Brooks, Jonda C. McNair,[5] and

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[2] Wadham, Rachel, et al. "Qualitative Dimensions of Text Complexity." *Integrating Young Adult Literature Through the Common Core Standards*, ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/byu/detail.action?docID=1115315.

[3] Randle, Kristen D. "Young Adult Literature: Let It Be Hope." *The English Journal*, Edited by Chris Crowe, 2001, pp. 125–129.

[4] Wilkerson, Norma J. "Advanced Placement (AP) List of Novels Tested Since 1971." 2017. https://www.crowleyisdtx.org/cms/lib5/TX01917780/Centricity/Domain/882/AP%20lit-%201971-2017-Titles%20from%20Open%20Response%20Questions.pdf

[5] Brooks, Wanda M., and Jonda C. McNair. "Expanding the Canon: Classic African American Young Adult Literature." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2015, pp. 15–23., doi:10.21061/alan.v42i2.a.2.

Rudine Sims Bishop[6] also discuss the benefits and possibilities presented in YA literature by defining a classic and explaining the importance of diversifying novels in the classroom. These articles discuss the possibilities presented in YA lit to reach students and allow them to connect with the books they are reading, which means that they still have the necessary literary qualities that I believe makes them teachable. Diverse YA literature meets the criteria set by schools and districts to teach critical thinking, close reading, analysis, and the written argument, making the case that the canon can and should be expanded to include more diverse novels.

As they stand, national curriculum standards created by the Department of Education seek to teach students how to read and write at grade level, while also teaching higher-level thinking and analysis. These standards are used to determine the texts taught in the classroom, and almost every year these texts stay the same: *Great Expectations*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Alchemist*, *Wuthering Heights*, etc. The novels have to be complex enough to create units that engage critical thinking skills while also being accessible enough to engage student interest. However, as Crowe and Kristen D. Randle explain, students are tired of the classics and the "dark is deep" philosophy. The traditional curriculums that teach books like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *I Am the Cheese* are viewed as bleak, self-absorbed, unrelatable, and depressing.

Student literacy and investment in reading has gone down because students aren't able to relate or access the classical canon. When asked to read *Romeo and Juliet* earlier this year, several of my students expressed frustration with understanding how a story written 500 years ago in a language they don't understand would be at all relevant or

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[6] Bishop, Rudine Sims. "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1990.

useful. As they came to understand the plot, they began to enjoy the story.[7] However, despite my attempts to make it relatable, my students struggled to see how a story written about teenagers getting married and committing suicide was in anyway comparable to their own experiences. The classical canon holds an important place in the classroom, but students struggle to engage with books that they can barely understand, especially since most of the characters are adults living in entirely different circumstances from their own. If students are struggling just to understand the language, then grasping the necessary analytical and critical thinking skills becomes nearly impossible. Many students want to see characters and situations they connect to and understand, which is difficult when the canon mostly consists of novels written by white males. I am arguing that YA novels by diverse authors have the complexity needed to teach the requisite reading, writing, and critical thinking skills in a language that students can relate to and understand. Many of these novels contain the higher-level vocabulary, realistic themes, and complex characters that can be found in the classical canon and they also contain stories and characters that the students are better able to connect to and analyze through their own life experiences.

One of the many required units for English teachers is that of poetry. Every year, teachers have students read Emily Dickinson, William Wordsworth, Robert Frost, William Shakespeare, Lewis Carroll, etc. for their poetry units. Some may include Langston Hughes or Maya Angelou, but the use of those poets is rare.[8] Even rarer is units

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[7] 1st, 2nd, & 5th period honors English, class discussions, September 13, 2021

[8] Lorcher, Trenton. "19 Popular Poems Taught in High School Lesson Plans." *ELA Common Core Lesson Plans*, 22 Aug. 2016, https://www.elacommoncorelessonplans.com/19-popular-poems-taught-in-high-school-lesson-plans.html; Poets.org. "Popular Poems to Teach." *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, 2021, https://poets.org/anthology/popular-poems-teach.

that include contemporary poetry. Creative writing classes can be more inclusive, but they tend to focus more on spoken word poetry over contemporary verse novels. Many students struggle to understand poetry, especially classical poetry with its numerous allusions to even older texts, and districts are trying to come up with a multitude of ways to explain the complexity of poetry in a way that students will understand. Many students have expressed frustration with classical poetry because it is often depressing or about topics they have no experience with. Students in my own classes have expressed their dislike of poetry, stating that it's "too confusing," "hard to write," and "stuff that people did back in the 1800's."[9]

Nebo School District has a poetry slam every year where students are asked to learn more about slam poetry and write their own poems to perform. It is a well-liked event and students respond positively to being able to express their own experiences and perspectives. Most teachers utilize various, well-known slam poets to teach a mini-unit on spoken word poetry to their students to prepare them for participating in the poetry slam. But a new depth could be added to an English classroom by utilizing contemporary verse novels, which blend narrative storytelling with the poetic form, and which often contain the same phonaesthetics found in slam poetry. Contemporary verse novels are some of the best mediums to explore poetic tools, themes, and language through topics and situations that the students can relate to. Many contemporary poets explore complex themes, the human experience, varied poetic tools, and adding shape to their poems.

To showcase this, I have created a unit plan centered around Elizabeth Acevedo's contemporary YA novel *The Poet X*. In this novel, Xiomara struggles with expressing

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[9] 3rd period creative writing, class discussion, November 8, 2021

herself due to societal expectations and her mother's abusive behaviors. The only way Xiomara can communicate is through her own poetry. The novel is written in verse and contains forms and styles that students may be unfamiliar with, including shape poems. Xiomara is a young Dominican American girl who is struggling under the weight of her mother's demands and expectations, her inability to express herself, and the way people perceive her. Xiomara's background, culture, and language are found throughout the novel, creating a story that can provide both a window and a mirror to the students reading the story. There are several complex themes, including sexuality, identity, and religion/faith, that Acevedo explores throughout the novel, which makes this the perfect novel to examine themes and how they interact with complex characters.

As a verse novel, this novel has a great deal of symbolism, allegory, figurative language, and parallelism. While the novel is simple in plot and word choice and sentence length, the themes are complex and difficult, which makes it suitable for an older reading level, despite its low Lexile score. The themes of sexuality and religion could be controversial, but they are things that fourteen and fifteen-year-olds are dealing with. These themes are also commonly found in the classics. For example, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a book that is commonly read deals specifically with the ideas of sin and adultery. The controversial themes found in *The Poet X* could be a deterrent to some, but the novel covers the adolescent experience well and it is a great verse novel that experiments with shape and other forms.

A novel's ability to inspire assignments depends on the complexity of the novel and its relatability to students. If students cannot access the novel and understand it, they would find it difficult to write about or discuss it. However, if a novel is too simple,

written assignments would not teach critical thinking and analysis.[10] The complex nature of *The Poet X* and the wealth of poetic opportunities presented by having the novel written in verse makes creating assignments for it meaningful. In addition to this, the novel itself fits the definitions of literary merit outlined above. The novel is written in a way that makes it comprehensible to students, relates the human experience (specifically Xiomara's experience as she struggles with being seen and heard), and is relatable to teenage students who may also be experiencing similar struggles.

II. Current Classroom Application

Despite educators' struggles to get YA novels introduced to an English curriculum, there are classes that use these books. Some schools, like Salem Junior High School, have a literature elective where the teacher has more freedom in choosing the books that the class reads. There are two such classes at Salem Junior called Novels and Literature and they are taught by an English teacher and a drama teacher. These teachers specifically choose YA novels to teach in the hopes that they will generate student interest and show them that there is more to reading than "stuffy, old books."[11] These classes are paving the way for introducing more and more diverse YA literature in the standard English classroom by starting the groundwork of showcasing a novel's literary qualities. Unfortunately, these classes are electives and are generally not taken as seriously by schools as a core English class. In addition to that, these classes make it

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[10] WAC Clearinghouse. "What Makes a Good Writing Assignment?" *The WAC Clearinghouse*, Colorado State University, 2021, https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/wac/intro/assignments/.
[11] Ashworth, Deanna and Ethan Dunn, Personal interview. 17 November 2021.

easier for school boards to keep the curriculum limited to the classics with YA books being classed as "other."

As I spoke to one of the Novels and Literature teachers, she expressed how much she loved teaching these kinds of classes because students were so much more engaged and interested. They have read everything from Japanese light novels (novelized manga) to *The Princess Bride*. This teacher decided to focus her Novels and Literature class on international authors as the next book they are reading is *Ruby Red* by German author Kerstin Gier. The other teacher has just finished *The Rithmatist* by Brandon Sanderson and is planning on beginning literature circles where students get into groups of five and choose from a list the next book they will read. Some of the books on this list include *Mistborn* by Brandon Sanderson, *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie, *Everlost* by Neal Shusterman, *Pendragon: Merchant of Death* by D.J. MacHale, and *The Ethan I Was Before* by Ali Standish. As evidenced by this list, there is a blend of YA and classical books presented to the class. They are all presented on equal ground and they will all be used to fulfill the same assignment at the end.[12]

Both of these teachers have expressed just how much interest their students have in the books they read. The students are fascinated with being allowed to read books with characters that act like them, think like them, look like them, and are in situations that they could find themselves in. According to one of the teachers, one of the students said that "it's so much easier to immerse myself in the story and really get into the plot and the build-up and all the ties when I can picture myself in that world." Having characters

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[12] Ashworth, Deanna and Ethan Dunn, Personal interview. 17 November 2021.

and situations that increase accessibility and relatability allows the students to really invest themselves in the books and they're more likely to look for deeper analysis.

Both Ashworth and Dunn explained how they try to teach these books like they would any other classic: they focus on analysis, character and theme development, the plot, or word impact. One teacher has students creatively describe the books by having them make "food trucks" out of symbols that explain the books they read. This is an exercise in analyzing symbolism as students are asked to visually depict various important themes, plot points, characters, and symbols from throughout the book and place them on the food truck in such a way that they can then explain them to the class. While I was discussing these classes with the teachers, one of them expressed that it can sometimes be difficult to match up books and certain state standards because state standards are often based on the classical canon. But he said that he just stretches the creative aspect to apply the state standards.[13] This showcases a secondary difficulty when it comes to teaching YA novels in a standard English class. The state standards and curriculums support the teaching of the classics, which can make it difficult to teach newer YA novels. However, both of these teachers have created assignments, like the aforementioned food trucks or like creating their own memoirs that allow students to meet the state standards.

Because of their status as electives, the teachers had little difficulty with controversial books in their class because most students were aware of the kinds of books they would be reading. In one teacher's case, she chooses books that have little content that would upset students or parents. The other teacher, Mr. Dunn, tackles it by giving the

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[13] Ashworth, Deanna and Ethan Dunn, Personal interview. 17 November 2021.

students more choice in which books they read, which means they quite literally sign up for the content.[14] Combining these two methods by choosing books that are low risk with literature circles where students have a choice would be one method of handling controversial topics and difficult content that sometimes crops up in YA novels. However, there is very little content in YA novels that is not also covered in classical lit with books like *Dracula*, *Anna Karenina*, and *The Scarlet Letter* discussing sexuality, murder, sin, identity, race, disease, and difficult families. In fact, the themes of identity, sin, sexuality, and difficult families are all themes discussed in *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo.

III. Unit Plan

9th Grade English Honors

Time Frame: 22 days—3.5 weeks

Essential Question: What is the power of voice and how is it tied to identity? How does identity influence your voice and vice versa?

Unit Plan Summary: One of the most prominent themes in *The Poet X* is Xiomara finding her voice. Throughout the novel, she hides her true thoughts and feelings by putting them down on paper instead of speaking them aloud. But at the end, she finally finds her voice and expresses herself. And as Xiomara finds her voice, she also finds herself. There are several complex themes that Elizabeth Acevedo explores throughout the novel, which

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[14] Ashworth, Deanna and Ethan Dunn, Personal interview. 17 November 2021.

makes this the perfect novel to examine themes and how they interact with complex characters. As a verse novel, this novel has a great deal of symbolism, allegory, figurative language, and parallelism. While the novel is simple in plot and word choice and sentence length, the themes of religion/faith, sexuality, identity, and family are complex and difficult, which makes it suitable for an older reading level. The themes of sexuality and religion could be controversial, but they are things that fourteen and fifteen year-olds are dealing with. The controversial themes could be a deterrent to some, but the novel covers the adolescent experience well and it is a great verse novel that experiments with shape and other forms. In addition to the form and literary devices used in the novel, the fact that the novel is written in the form of and about slam poetry makes it fit perfectly in Nebo's slam poetry unit and competition. Students will be participating in a district-wide unit on slam poetry and Acevedo is very well-known in the slam poetry world. These attributes of the novel make it worth teaching despite the controversy associated with it.

To explore the essential question, students will track themes and characters throughout the novel. They will examine how the characters change and develop over the course of the novel. They will watch the progression and development of a theme and how it is reflected through Xiomara. Students will explain how the other themes' development help Xiomara find her voice. The students will create predictions throughout the novel based on context clues and theme progression. They will participate in discussions where they discuss the themes and make connections between the themes and the structure of the novel.

The final assessment works with Reading Literature Standards 2, 3, and 4 for several reasons. Standards 2 and 3 specifically ask students to examine themes and characters

and how they change over the course of a text. Having the students choose a theme or a character and analyze the development of the theme/character over the course of the novel is an almost exact translation of these standards. Students will be looking at how theme and character development are closely tied. And they will be examining the language and structure of the novel to see how it ties into these developments. One activity that students will have done is to have already picked a theme and character at the start of the novel and tracked the progress. Students will have been primed for this final assessment by this activity and by discussions throughout the novel. The need for textual evidence for analysis will ensure that students have read the novel and can support the stance they are taking. And students will apply what they learned through analysis in their own writing.

This unit will allow for differentiation in a few different ways. Several of the activities allow for students to choose based on their interests and skill levels, while others can be shifted and changed to accommodate different needs. Students will also have choices in how they fill out their vocabulary journals, how they participate in class discussions, and how they complete their final assessment. While aspects of the final assessment are set, they can choose the themes and characters and how they create their final product.

Utah State Core Standards	Learning Targets	Assessments
Reading Literature Standard 2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.	I can choose a theme and follow it's progression throughout the novel. I can choose a theme by participating in a theme activity where I use textual evidence and repeated ideas to draw conclusions about theme. I can connect the themes to the development of Xiomara's character and	Formative: Theme Fishbowl discussion Predictions Exit ticket Passage annotations Class Theme Chart Theme Timeline

	to the development of other characters in the novel.	
		Summative: Final analysis and slam poetry
	I can use textual evidence to support the development of the theme over the course of the text.	
	I can make personal connections to the themes in the novel.	
	I can explain in discussions how a theme helps develop Xiomara's voice and identity.	
Reading Literature Standard 3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.	I can choose a character and track their development and growth throughout the novel. I can connect the development of a character to a theme. I can examine my own growth and connect it to the novel.	Formative: Character Fishbowl discussion Predictions Exit tickets Passage annotations Character Bios Character Timeline Summative: Final analysis and slam poetry
Reading Literature Standard 4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).	I can analyze how the structure of the novel affects the tone and meaning by looking at word choice, literary devices, and poem topics. I can learn about poetic literary devices and how they connect to themes and their development. I can complete a vocabulary journal that focuses on literary devices and word choice. I can examine the setting of the novel, the background of the characters, and the pacing of the novel to analyze how these affect the development of character and theme.	Formative: Exit tickets Passage annotations Vocab journal Novel and Character Background Worksheets Summative: Annotation in final analysis and application to slam poetry.

Assignment Sheet

Summary: For this assessment, students would have two choices for how they could complete it. One choice would be for them to choose a theme and analyze several poems that are related to that theme. After analyzing five poems, students would then write their own poem about the same theme. Some of the themes students could use would be faith, voice, identity, and family. The students would all have to analyze the poems and write their own, but they can choose their theme, which poems to analyze, and the structure and theme of their own poem. A second choice would be for the students to pick a character and analyze their growth over the course of the novel. However, this option is more limited in choices as really only Mami, Xiomara, and Xavier show much growth throughout the novel. Students would choose five poems that show these characters and their growth. After analyzing the poems, students would write their own poem about their personal growth. I would also have an option for students to verbally present their poem if they wish to, in order to capture the true spirit of slam poetry.

Name: Date:

Period: Score:

Personal Voice and You

"There is power in the word." This is one of Xiomara's final statements in the novel. Now that you have read *The Poet X* and followed the progression on a theme and character throughout the novel, it's time for you to show me what you learned about the power of voice and it's importance in the novel.

Due Date: April, 30

Choose *one* of the options below:

1. **Xiomara's Development**

   Reading Analysis: Choose one of the listed themes from the novel. Analyze Xiomara's development throughout the novel through the lens of this theme. Choose five poems that span the length of the novel and that relate to the theme that show how Xiomara has grown. Two poems will be provided for you, but you will choose the other three poems. Be sure to include at least ten pieces of textual evidence to support your analysis. Remember to analyze how the theme helps build Xiomara's voice.

   Creative Writing: Write your own slam poem about your chosen theme. This should include your thoughts, your experiences, your shifts in perspective, etc.

2. **Theme Development**

   Reading Analysis: Choose one of the listed themes. Analyze the development of that theme through the growth and development of other characters in the novel. Choose five poems that sufficiently show the development of the theme through other character's actions. Two poems will be provided for you, but you will choose another three poems to analyze. Be sure to include at least ten pieces of textual evidence to support your analysis. Remember to analyze how the theme and characters help build up personal voice.

   Creative Writing: Write your own slam poem about your own personal growth. This can include how your perspectives have changed, a defining moment that changed you, the ways you wish to grow, etc.

Themes: **Characters:**

   a. Faith/Religion   a. Xavier
   b. Sexuality   b. Mami
   c. Identity   c. Father Sean
   d. Family   d. Aman

Extra Credit: Slam poetry is meant to be read aloud. You may orally present your slam poem in class for extra credit. You can record it or present live.

Grading Rubric

Total: _____/70

Extra Credit Performance: ____/5

Passing Score: 42/70

Reading Analysis Rubric:

	4—Exceeds Expectations	3—Meets Expectations	2—Needs Improvement	1—Not Present
Theme Development (20 pts)		You have identified a theme. You have chosen poems that adequately show the development of the chosen theme. You have explained the development of the theme over the course of the novel and how it ties into the development of voice and identity.		
Character Development (20 pts)		You have chosen characters and linked that character to a theme. You have chosen poems that adequately show the development of that character over the course of the novel and how their development ties into the development of personal voice and identity.		
Poem Structure (15 pts)		You have adequately examined the poem and novel structure for how it affects		

		character and theme development. You have also adequately examined the structure for how it affects plot development and tone.		
Textual Connections (10 pts)		You have a total of five poems that adequately show theme/character development. You have ten pieces of textual evidence. You have made some (1–2) personal or real-world connections to the theme/character.		
Analysis Format (5 pts)		The analysis is 3–5 pages in length and formatted properly in MLA style. There are few grammar mistakes. If performed, you follow slam poetry conventions, such as inflection and body movement.		

Planning Resources

Research topics that will supplement the teaching of your literature unit. Go beyond what we have read in class and see what others are doing to teach the material you are teaching. Your inquiry may focus on the use of a particular class structure or on a particular text or theme. You may also choose to research the teaching of a genre unfamiliar to you. Regardless of what you research, there must be a clear link between your research inquiry and your unit plan.

With your focus in mind, review articles, book chapters, and lesson resources that deal with your topic. You should be searching for two different types of resources—both research-based approaches and lesson plan ideas. For the research-based approaches I suggest locating articles from *English Journal, Voices From the Middle* or similar publications. Books and book chapters are also incredibly helpful. Choose these sources based on their relevance to your topic. Articles should be both recent (published within the past 10 years) and relevant to your inquiry.

The second type of resource—lesson plan resources—should include ideas from other teachers vetted through reliable sources such as ReadWriteThink, TeachIt English, NCTE Connected Community, English Companion Ning, Web English Teacher, UEN English/Language Arts Resources, or TeachersFirst. Teacher blogs, Teachers-Pay-Teachers, Pinterest, and Instagram don't qualify. While these sources might offer a helpful jumping off point, most of the ideas they showcase typically have origins in other sources. I'm pushing you to go to the original, peer-reviewed source. No credit will be given for non-peer-reviewed resources.

Resource	Annotation
Andrew, Scott. "Teen Identity and Tough Situations - ReadWriteThink." *Readwritethink.org*, Readwritethink.org, 2008, www.readwritethink .org/parent-afterschool-resources/podcast-episodes/teen-	This podcast discusses teen identity and part of the reason that I chose *The Poet X* is because it is about a teenager trying to decide who she is and how she fits and how to use her voice. This is something most students can relate to as they try to navigate their own adolescence. This podcast covers how adolescents can address questions about identity. While this podcast summarizes several different novels, it does pose great questions to ask students when they are reading books about developing and challenging identity, such as considering different perspectives, how to address difficult and complex situations, and how they would react to the situations in the novel. This resource has great suggestions for getting students to see their own developing identity and how other people's identities develop. It is a great primer

identity-tough-situations-30341.html.	for having the students track Xiomara's own personal growth and identity throughout the novel. Trying to discuss identity with teens can be difficult, especially when it is coming from an adult. But having the students put themselves in another's situation and talk about identity in their own terms and what it means to them is a great way for them to connect to the essential question.
Natbony, Rachel. "Free Teaching Guide: The Poet X." *Prestwick House*, Prestwick House, www.prestwickhouse.com/blog/post/2020/04/how-to-teach-the-poet-x.	This particular source explores other novels and works that relate to the themes present in the novel. While I am not doing literature circles this unit, I could certainly pull excerpts from these novels and short stories to use in theme discussions. This source also has an idea to pull specific poems out for standalone analysis, which will help the students build up their analysis skills for their final assessment. This source has great base ideas for teaching the themes of *The Poet X* as well as giving other sources for teaching slam poetry and about Acevedo. However, as useful as it is for a basis, it is very simple and bare bones. It serves more as a base for how to structure the unit more than anything.
Christensen, Linda. "Finding Voice: Learning about Language and Power." *Voices From the Middle*, vol. 18, no. 3, Mar. 2011. *NCTE*, library.ncte.org/journals/vm/issues/v18-3/13560.	This source discusses the intersection of voice and power, which is one of the main themes of *The Poet X* and part of the essential question for the unit. This article discusses how to bring diverse voices into the classroom and discuss how language and voice are tied to power and identity. These are all huge things to discuss when it comes to the novel. Xiomara uses the language of her community, which is a mix of English and Spanish and is not always "Standard" English. Part of the novel is Xiomara discovering herself and her voice. This source discusses how language is tied to communities and identity and is a great source for how to teach the importance of English dialects. Because language and silence are such important components of *The Poet X*, I think it is really important to point out how Xiomara is a diverse voice and that it is important to listen to diverse voices. I would want students to look at the choices that Acevedo makes in her word choice and sentence structure and how that affects both the characters and the themes as well as the overall tone of the novel.
Ellis, Lindsay, et al. "Out Loud: The CommonLanguage of Poetry." *English Journal*, vol. 93, no. 1, Sept. 2003. *NCTE*, library.ncte.org/jour	This article discusses how slam poetry can help students understand written poetry better and connect with it more. Since many students dread and dislike poetry units because they feel disconnected from the language, topics, and form. Ellis, Gere, and Lamberton showcase how performing poetry helps give students voice and makes them take more charge of their own learning. Students learn from each other and they understand the poetry better as they practice reading aloud. Part

nals/ej/issues/v93-1/2608.	of this source has students picking poetry that articulates something that they are interested in. I think this is a great idea because it gets students interested based on their own interests and it shows them that poetry is more than just the classics. I think having students watch and interact with slam poems on a wide variety of topics will help them on their final assessment when they choose a theme or perspective to connect with and write about.
TeachIt Editorial Team. "20 Teaching Ideas for Poetry." *1000s Of English Teaching Resources - Teachit English*, TeachIt English, 2013, www.teachitenglish.co.uk/resources/ks3/20-teaching-ideas-for/teaching-tools/20-teaching-ideas-for-poetry/21498.	This is a short sheet that discusses some great strategies for teaching poetry. It recommends some great activities to encourage students on how to read and analyze poetry. It has some great ideas like blanking words and having students fill in new words, which would showcase the importance of word choice and how it affects meaning and word tone, which would in turn affect things like theme and character development. Other activities include performing the poems, which works great for slam poetry and would help students practice before their final project. It would also help them understand the nuances of slam poetry. This source has some great ideas for how to make poetry interesting and easier to understand and they could be scaffolded in to help students with their final analyses.
Wolk, Steven. "Reading Democracy: Exploring Ideas That Matter with Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature." *NCTE*, English Journal, 2013, library.ncte.org/journals/EJ/issues/v103-2/24296.	This article discusses the importance of having students read and explore ideas and topics that matter to them. When students are more invested in the topics discussed in the novel, they will be more interested in the novel itself. They will interact with and connect with the text more and on a much deeper level. Because part of this unit is getting students to examine and connect with the characters and themes, this article is a great resource. It promotes their caring and empathy and it allows them to connect it to current trends and events. Students are more likely to be led by inquiry and curiosity as they ask questions and interact with the text because it is contemporary to them. The source recommends allowing students to explore through inquiry and choosing how to form real-world applications.

Unit Outline:

Learning Target	Activating Strategy	Lesson Focus & Teaching Strategy	Formative Assessment	Homework
Introduction/Verse Novels Students will be introduced to the text, verse novels, and slam poetry. They will examine the shape, sound, and word choice of example poems.	Students will begin to identify poetic tools and figurative language in slam poems by observing examples of slam poets performing their poetry.	Students will identify poetic tools, figurative language, and phonaesthetics in example slam poems from various poets and from the novel. Students will also get to practice using the figurative language and poetic tools that they learned a few class periods ago. Students will examine how poetry and fiction blend together in a verse novel.	Informal class discussion (participation)	Pages 1–48
Cultural Context Students will be introduced to the cultural and authorial background. They will note how they think the cultural background will influence the novel and the characters.	Students will watch a video of Acevedo talking about the text. They will then write a journal entry answering this question: What does voice mean to you?	This lesson will focus on the cultural and authorial background of the novel, as well as introduce the themes of the novel. Students will listen to a short lecture about Acevedo and Harlem. During the lecture, students will note how they think the cultural background will influence the novel and the characters. Then they will be introduced to a deeper look at the themes in the text and students will choose the themes and characters they want to track over the course of the novel.	Whip around with the most interesting thing they learned.	Pages 1–48
Annotate specific poems Students will be able to annotate poems that relate to theme development	Students are going to create a word cloud by writing one word that they associate with the text.	I will pull specific poems from the first reading homework that relate to the themes. Students are going to analyze the poems based on theme. They will annotate them with connections, thoughts, predictions, and figurative language. They will use their previous notes and just	An exit ticket about what they learned about their theme.	Pages 1–48

		note how word choice and structure affects things like theme and characters. This will be a guided practice. Students will use past notes that they have written to try and analyze the poems.		
Annotate specific poems Students will be able to annotate poems that relate to theme development	Students are going to answer the journal prompt: What is a personal experience you have had with the theme that you have chosen to track?	Students will continue to analyze poems about different themes, but this time they will also be considering how the structure and word choice affects theme development. After they have finished, students will read from the novel.	Their Annotations	Pages 1–48
Character Bios Students will be able to write a bio about the characters presented in the novel.	Students will answer the journal prompt: What was an event in your life that changed your perspective on something?	Students will be creating character bio sheets where they draw and write about a character in the novel. These will be hung around the classroom and will be added to over the course of the novel.	Character bios	Pages 49–92
Finish Part 1 Students will be able to listen to and read aloud the novel. They will be able to participate in a discussion relating to the character and the themes.	Listen to some slam poets like Mike Rosen, Sarah Kay, and Shane Koyczan and write their thoughts about the poet's chosen topic.	Students will try to imitate the rhythm of slam poetry from Acevedo's readings and other slam poets as they finish part 1 in a class read-aloud. Students will note their own feelings about the development of the characters and the themes. They will write about how they connect to or don't connect to the themes being presented.	Exit ticket noting speaking practices in slam poetry	Pages 49–92
Finish Part 1 Students will be able to listen to and read aloud the novel. They will be able to participate in a discussion relating	Listen to a slam poet and write their thoughts about the poet's chosen topic.	Students will listen to Acevedo's audiobook and then try to imitate the rhythm of slam poetry as they finish Part 1 in a class read-aloud. Students will complete a short discussion	Whip around about what they like about slam poetry. Students will submit their timelines.	Pages 49–92 Prepare for tomorrow's discussion

to the character and the themes.		about what they would do in Xiomara's situation at this point in the novel. Students will also complete a timeline of the themes and characters so far in the novel.		
Part 1 Fishbowl Discussion Students will be able to participate in a fishbowl discussion about theme.	Students will get into theme groups and complete a bell ringer about their theme's progression. They will find textual evidence to show its development.	Students will follow discussion etiquette as they participate in a fishbowl discussion about theme development in Part 1. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes on the other themes' development and how it relates to their theme and to the development of voice.	Discussion notes	Prepare for tomorrow's discussion
Part 1 Fishbowl Discussion Students will be able to participate in a discussion about character.	Students will get into their character groups and complete a bell ringer about their character's development. They will find textual evidence to show its development.	Students will follow discussion etiquette as they participate in a fishbowl discussion about character development in Part 1. Students not in the fishbowl will takes notes on the other characters' development and how they relate to their character and to the development of voice.	Discussion notes	Pages 95–150
Part 1 Vocabulary and Part 2 Students will be able to identify and define vocabulary terms and poetic devices.	Students will work on their vocab journals by looking up words they wrote down.	Students will work on their personal dictionaries in their vocab journal by defining and illustrating words they are not familiar with. They will also look through Part 1 for examples of different literary and poetic devices.	Exit ticket with a new term they learned.	Pages 95–150
Finish Part 2 Students will be able to listen to and read aloud the novel. They will be able to participate in a discussion relating	Listen to a slam poet and write their thoughts about the topic.	Students will try to imitate the rhythm and other characteristics of slam poetry from Acevedo's readings and other slam poets as they finish Part 2 in a class read-aloud. Students	Participation in read aloud and exit ticket noting speaking practices in slam poetry.	Pages 95–150

to the character and the themes.		will complete a short discussion about what they would do in Xiomara's situation at this point in the novel.		
Finish Part 2 Students will be able to listen to and read aloud the novel. They will be able to participate in a discussion relating to the character and the themes.	Listen to a slam poet and write their thoughts about the topic.	Students will try to imitate the rhythm and other characteristics of slam poetry from Acevedo's readings and other slam poets as they finish Part 2 in a class read-aloud. Students will complete a short discussion about what they would do in Xiomara's situation at this point in the novel. Students will also complete a timeline of the themes and characters so far in the novel.	Participation in read aloud and exit ticket noting speaking practices in slam poetry Students will submit their timelines.	Pages 151–206
Part 2 Fishbowl Discussion Students will be able to participate in a discussion about theme.	Students will get into theme groups and complete a bell ringer about their theme's progression. They will find textual evidence to show its development.	Students will follow discussion etiquette as they participate in an independent fishbowl discussion about theme development in Part 2. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes on the other themes' development and how it relates to their theme and to the development of voice.	Discussion Notes	Pages 207–253
Part 2 Fishbowl Discussion Students will be able to participate in a discussion about character.	Students will get into character groups and complete a bell ringer about their character's progression. They will find textual evidence to show their development.	Students will follow discussion etiquette as they participate in an independent fishbowl discussion about character development in Part 2. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes on the other characters' development and how they relate to their character and to the development of voice.	Discussion notes	Pages 254–313

Part 2 Vocabulary and Part 3 Students will be able to identify and define vocabulary terms and poetic devices.	Students will work on their vocab journals by looking up words they wrote down.	Students will work on their personal dictionaries in their vocab journal by defining and illustrating words they are not familiar with. They will also look through Part 2 for examples of different literary and poetic devices. They will begin reading part 3 if they get done early.	Exit ticket with a new term they learned.	Pages 315–357
Finish Part 3 Students will be able to listen to and read aloud the novel. They will be able to participate in a discussion relating to the character and the themes.	Listen to a slam poet and write their thoughts about the topic.	Students will try to imitate the rhythm and other characteristics of slam poetry from Acevedo's readings and other slam poets as they finish Part 3 in a class read-aloud. Students will complete a short discussion about what they would do in Xiomara's situation at this point in the novel.	Participation in read aloud and exit ticket noting speaking practices in slam poetry	Pages 315–357
Finish Part 3 Students will be able to listen to and read aloud the novel. They will be able to participate in a discussion relating to the character and the themes.	Listen to a slam poet and write their thoughts about the topic.	Students will try to imitate the rhythm and other characteristics of slam poetry from Acevedo's readings and other slam poets as they finish Part 3 in a class read-aloud. Students will complete a short discussion about what they would do in Xiomara's situation at this point in the novel. Students will also complete a timeline of the themes and characters so far in the novel.	Participation in read aloud and exit ticket noting speaking practices in slam poetry Students will submit their timelines.	Pages 315–357
Part 3 Fishbowl Discussion Students will be able to participate in a discussion about theme	Students will get into theme groups and complete a bell ringer about their theme's progression. They will find textual evidence to	Students will follow discussion etiquette as they participate in an independent fishbowl discussion about theme development in Part 3 and in the text overall. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes on the other themes'	Discussion notes	Discussion prep

	show its development.	development and how it relates to their theme and to the development of voice.		
Part 3 Fishbowl Discussion Students will be able to participate in a discussion about character.	Students will get into character groups and complete a bell ringer about their character's progression. They will find textual evidence to show their development.	Students will follow discussion etiquette as they participate in an independent fishbowl discussion about character development in Part 3 and in the text overall. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes. Students not in the fishbowl will take notes on the other characters' development and how they relate to their character and to the development of voice.	Discussion notes	Novel project
Part 3 Vocabulary and In class project time Students will be able to identify and define vocabulary terms and poetic devices.	Students will work on their vocab journals by looking up words they wrote down.	Students will work on their personal dictionaries in their vocab journal by defining and illustrating words they are not familiar with. They will also look through Part 3 for examples of different literary and poetic devices. They will begin working on their reading analysis and creative writing project if they get done early.	Exit ticket with a new term they learned.	Novel Project
Class Work Day Students will spend class time working on their projects and preparing to present their slam poems.	Students will start class by listening to a slam poet.	Students will spend class time working on their reading analysis and creative writing. If they want to record their slam poem, they can do that during class. Any homework would be just finishing up their project.	Whip around of their favorite slam poet that they listened to.	Novel Project
Present Poems Students will be able to listen to and present their slam poets.	Students will watch one of Elizabeth Acevedo's slam poetry sessions.	Students will perform their own poems for the class. Students not performing will fill out evaluations stating what they liked about their classmates' poems.	The evaluations and presentation	

Vocabulary Plan: Vocabulary for this novel is going to be somewhat different. Because

the text is fairly simple, students are not going to have a set of terms to interact with, but

rather, they are going to create personal dictionaries in a vocabulary journal. As they read

the novel, students will be encouraged to write down words they don't recognize or aren't

entirely comfortable with defining. On certain days, students will have time to define and

illustrate these terms in their notebooks. By having students define *and* illustrate the

terms, they are getting the technical definition, but they also have to be comfortable and

familiar enough with the words to illustrate them.

In addition to defining their own terms, students need to be very familiar and comfortable

with literary devices and poetry terms as it is an essential part of their final assessment.

For this part, students will define them and then find poems and examples in the novel

that showcase that device. This strategy teaches students to identify literary elements and

to associate them to their definition. It also teaches them to make connections between

words and their definition as they have to know enough about the word to draw it.

Students would have set days to sit down and define the terms and find examples, but

they would also be encouraged to keep their vocabulary journal open during reading and

to take notes as they read. This will make the vocabulary days much more effective. I will

also point out examples of literary and poetic devices as we read to help students note

what they are looking for. In addition, by having them pull and cite quotes, students will

have a resource to draw from when it comes to choosing poems for final analysis (or they

might at least serve as prompts).

The Poet X Vocabulary Guide:

Term/Device	Definition	Textual Examples
Metaphor		
Simile		
Irony		
Allusion		
Symbolism		
Hyperbole		
Synthesia		
Imagery		
Foreshadowing		
Parallelism		

LESSON PLAN

PLANNING

Date: November 14, 2021   **Class and Grade Level:** 8/9th Creative Writing
Title/Subject of Lesson: Introduction to spoken word poetry and *The Poet X*

State (or Common) Core Curriculum Standard(s):	Learning Objective(s):	Assessment(s):
Reading Literature Standard 2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.	I can experiment with a new creative form through observation.

I can identify poetic tools and forms in example poems.

I can look at the creative potential of poetry by examining successful poetic works.

I can identify the theme or main message of individual poems. | Class Discussion

Original Poem |

Concept(s) to Be Taught:
Students will be learning about the spoken word poetry genre, the key components of spoken word poetry, phonaesthetics, text-to-self connections, poetic form and tools

Rationale:
Students have made an incredible amount of progress in their novels, but I also want to expose them to different kinds of creative writing. At this point, some of the students are beginning to hit a bit of a creative wall and there is proof that working on other projects can help inspire ideas in a project that has hit a dead end. So students will get to extend their creative reach to another form of writing and hopefully that will help inspire more ideas for their novel. They will also get to practice using the figurative language and poetic tools that we discussed a few class periods ago. In addition to this, the poetry that they write in this class could potentially be performed in the Nebo Slam Poetry competition at the end of the school year. Students will also get to see how poetry and fiction can be blended together in the form of a verse novel.

Materials Needed:
Vocabulary Guide Worksheet
Audiobook
Canvas videos (linked below)

Learning Strategies to Be Used:
Students will participate in a guided discussion, share their thoughts with a partner, and begin applying the tools and forms to their own writing.

PERFORMING

Announcements:

Continuation from Previous Lesson: Last class, you used music to inspire a scene in your novel. The class before that, we talked about figurative language like alliteration, metaphor, and personification. Now, what form of literature is music similar to? Right, poetry!

Lesson Presentation:

A) Preparing for Learning:
    Bell Ringer [Students will watch two examples of spoken word poetry and discuss what they noticed in the poems.]
    As students discuss, ask prompting questions like "What were the topics of their poems? What were they writing about? What did you notice about their emotions? About their word choice? Did you notice any poetic tools like metaphor and personification?" If needed, play the two poems again so that students can seek these out.

B) Directing the Learning:
    Now I know this seems like something of a topic shift since you've been working on your novels pretty steadily for the last month. However, this unit serves two purposes. For one, it's been shown that working on other things can sometimes help with writer's block because it gets your mind off of what's stuck and it can help generate ideas. For another, writing in another medium can inspire new ideas. And, I want to show you that there is more than one medium for creative writing. You can even write novels in poetic form. Look *at Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson or *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo.
    So today, we are going to look at some fantastic examples of spoken word and slam poetry so that you can get a feel for the form and see just what it is capable of. We'll spend the next couple of weeks alternating between your novels and your poetry. By the end of the poetry unit, you will be expected to have written at

least one original poem, but we'll talk about that more later. For now, we're going to listen to other people's poetry. As you listen to each poem, notice how they sound, the rhythms that you can hear. I also want you to notice what each poem is about. We'll discuss these after as a class.

1. If I Should Have a Daughter

2. To The Boys Who May One Day Date My Daughter

3. Touchscreen

4. When God Happens

5. Dear Future Generations: Sorry

6. I Sued The School System

7. Troll - Shane Koyczan

8. To This Day Project - Shane Koyczan

Now, my question to you is: which of these were your favorites? Why did you like them?

C) Reinforcing the Learning:
You discovered all of these amazing things about this form of poetry today. It's a form of poetry that is only 40 years old. But you want to know something even more amazing? Poetry isn't just a form of creative writing reserved for a few lines on a page or a presentation that's only a few minutes. One particularly prolific spoken word poet is Elizabeth Acevedo. She's a fantastic spoken word poet and she used her talent with this form of poetry to write a novel titled *The Poet X*. It's about a young Dominican-American girl named Xiomara who is struggling with her voice, her identity, and her place in the world. Verse novels are gaining more and more ground. And isn't that fascinating? An entire story told using verse. To conclude our intro to slam poetry, I want you to experience a story being told through multiple forms of poetry.
You all have a copy of the book in front of you. Flip to a random page and choose a poem, raise your hand, and we'll read it as a class. Pick poems that interest you. As we listen to Acevedo read this poem, I want you to notice a few things about it. What's the rhythm like? How does it sound? What does it look like? What's happening in the poem? Does she use any figurative language? What is it? After each poem, we'll talk about your observations.

ATAWT Students will spend the remainder of class examining Acevedo's novel.

IV. *The Poet X* **Implementation and Findings**

As a student teacher, it's nearly impossible to change the curriculum, especially for an Honors class, where there are a lot of expectations placed on the students and the teacher. However, my creative writing class has a poetry unit designed into it where students are supposed to study poetry examples and write their own poetry. Instead of having students write poems in the more traditional style of Dickinson or Wordsworth or Shakespeare, I decided to introduce the students to spoken word poetry. Spoken word poetry has been around for almost 40 years and has strong ties to jazz, hip-hop, and urban culture. As an art form, it relies heavily on phonaesthetics, which means that the sound and flow and rhythm of the words is just as important as the words themselves. While many creative writing classes have slam poetry units, they usually use examples from well-known poets like Sarah Kay, Shane Koyczan, Taylor Mali, or the duo Hannah Halpern and Amina Iro. These poets are all masters of their craft and many have won awards at poetry slams on a range of topics including bullying, the realities of being human, stereotypes and discrimination, and the value of teachers. But verse novels like *The Poet X* address similarly weighty topics over the course of the text while also showcasing various poem styles, such as freestyle, shape poems, traditional poems, and poems of varying lengths and rhythms. Not only can students learn about poetry as an artform, they can also discover how poetry can be used to tell a story over the course of a text.

I introduced my students to their poetry unit by showing examples of slam poems and we discussed the art form of spoken word poetry. The students loved it. They were fascinated by the topics, the rhythms, and the sounds. One student remarked that they

didn't know poetry could sound so "cool." After they understood what spoken word poetry was and sounded like, I introduced them to *The Poet X* and verse novels. Most students weren't even aware that you could write a novel in verse and immediately began planning ways to incorporate that into their writing. Because this is a creative writing class, I didn't have students focus on the themes or character development as much as I had them focus on topic and form. They chose specific poems from the novel and examined the form, figurative language, phonaesthetics, and content. Part of the reason why I chose *The Poet X* in conjunction with a slam poetry unit is because Elizabeth Acevedo is a slam poet and she reads the novel herself in the audiobook, so students were able to read and listen to the poems.

The results were amazing. Students noticed rhythms, connections, and symbolism that they weren't able to identify in other more traditional poems. They were invested in the story and how the poems were linked together. While this was a short, isolated lesson that focused on the poetic form rather than the novel, the students got more into poetry as a form of creative writing in one class than I had managed in the two classes previously. It was relevant to them and focused on topics that they are incredibly familiar with. While classical poetry and novels may cover these same themes, the language and character barriers prevent students from being able to fully connect with the ideas. They have to translate the text, either literally in the case of language or figuratively by trying to relate to characters who have wildly different experiences from them, whether that is because of race, gender, age, or background. With the translation barrier removed, the students were invested. They *wanted* to learn more about poetry and how to write it. Introducing a few selected poems from a YA verse novel transformed my class's interaction with the text.

And one student who is an ELL enjoyed reading a text that sprinkled in Spanish language and culture throughout. One short lesson affected my entire class's interaction with the genre by making it accessible to them.

V. Conclusion

Young Adult Literature is a growing genre that addresses the needs and experiences of today's students. Students see themselves in the text and are able to form more text-to-self and text-to-world connections expressly because the books are reflecting the changing world. They still address similar themes of family, faith, truth, love, and the human experience, but in a language that the students are able to access. While some may argue that YA lit does not meet the complexity and artistic standards needed to teach students critical thinking, deeper-level analysis, and grade-level writing skills, there is clear evidence that these books do in fact meet these standards. The classical canon has always been in flux. Books that were once considered children's novels or low-brow are now an accepted and praised part of the classical canon. As the world changes and as student experiences and demographics change, we should change the canon with it. The current classics still hold value, but they can be combined with newer books that offer different perspectives in a language that students can access and interact with. In addition to this fact, the purpose of school and education has always been to provide students with the tools and skills they need to express themselves, live productively, and create. If YA novels are able to teach these skills while making students actively engaged and excited about learning, why shouldn't we be incorporating

these texts into our standard curriculum? Education belongs to everyone and the books our students read should reflect that.

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