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# Ca(n)non Fodder No More: Disrupting Common Arguments that Support a Canonical Empire

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**Abstract**: This paper uses an assignment given to the authors' preservice teachers to address and push back against common arguments used to uphold canonical text selection in secondary ELA classrooms. Using the metaphor of canon defense as empire building first made by Toni Morrison in the canon debates of the 1980s, the authors examine the weaknesses in arguments made that posit that canonical texts are necessary reading for secondary ELA classrooms because they are the highest quality available texts, have the allusions necessary for entrance into scholarly and literary spaces, and address the most important themes for classroom exploration. The authors argue that canon disruption in ELA classrooms can help to dismantle various institutional and systemic inequalities the canon reflects and supports.

**Keywords:** canon disruption, canonical texts, curricular Whiteness, secondary ELA, teacher education

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"Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature, and range (of criticism, of history, of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, the humanistic imagination), is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested."

- Toni Morrison, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken, The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*

On January 24, 1988, the New York Times published a statement written by forty-eight Black writers that commented that neither Toni Morrison nor James Baldwin had won a National Book Award or Pulitzer Prize for their work. In the letter, prolific writers, activists, and thinkers, like Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, Paule Marshall, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, and Barbara Christian lamented the fact that Baldwin died and never "received the honor of these keystones to the canon of American literature" (par. 5). They then turned to the living treasure we had not yet lost, Toni Morrison, and noted that even though "all the literate world knows Toni Morrison" (par. 8) and even though her work had "advanced the moral and artistic standards by which we must measure the daring and the love of our national imagination and our collective intelligence as a people" (par. 11), her work had yet to receive the recognition it deserved. The article was presented as a praise song to Morrison, highlighting the literary merit and highly valued nature of her life and works. It was also a critique of the canon, a jarring reminder that only certain works and certain people are considered important enough to be canonical. In this way, the letter called forth the fact that the single supreme authority that ruled over our literary and philosophical standards was an empire of white writing and thought.

According to Merriam-Webster, a canon is a regulation, criterion, or standard, or a body of principles, rules, or norms. Considering this definition, the Black writers who penned the letter acknowledged that the awards committees were producing a hidden message, one that stated that Black writing was not standard and that it could not be viewed as a part of the norm. The idea that Black writers and other writers of color were abnormal or aberrations to 'traditional' writing was amplified six years later, upon the publishing of Harold Bloom's The Western Canon (1994). Within this text, Bloom surveyed the literary works of twenty-six white authors to better understand their authoritative nature in Western culture. At the end of this book, he included an appendix of canonical works of "religious, philosophical, historical, and scientific writings that are themselves of great aesthetic interest" (p. 531). This list is divided into four ages: Theocratic (*Illiad, Odyssey, Aeneid*), Aristocratic (*Divine Comedy, Don Quixote, Hamlet*), Democratic (*Pride and Prejudice, Moby-Dick, Anna Karenina*), and Chaotic (*Ulysses, The Great Gatsby, Things Fall Apart*). Noticeably, although writing by women and people of color are sprinkled throughout, the authors Bloom uplifts are mostly white men. Women of color constitute a small percentage of the overall list. Although a summary of the book and an excavation of the list of canonical texts is beyond the scope of this article, we include this text and examples to showcase how conversations surrounding the canon are not new, to note how writing by certain groups of people have been marginalized throughout time. We include this information to once again put forth a question that has been asked numerous times: canonical for whom?

Both of us are teacher educators who have grappled with this question in our classrooms and in our work. Specifically, Stephanie prizes the speculative works of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, and Multiracial women. She has studied the literary work and philosophical thought of numerous scholars who signed the letter supporting the life and work of Toni Morrison. She consistently questions the nature of canonization and its impact on secondary ELA classrooms, with a particular focus on how the enshrining of certain texts also implicitly showcases whose thoughts and ideas are protected in U.S. schools and whose are considered irregular or deviant within paradigms of standardization. Heidi became an English teacher originally because of her deep affection and connection to the canonical literature she encountered as a high schooler. As a teacher, it didn't take long for her to question the relevance, representation, and readability of the canonical texts that were part of the high school's book room, especially when faced with actual students' indifference toward and frustration with the texts. Her questioning of the canon's impact on secondary ELA classrooms has now led her to critically examine how literature selected for ELA classrooms could more accurately reflect and represent the experiences of the diverse youth who read it.

**"The enshrining of certain texts also implicitly showcases whose thoughts and ideas are protected in U.S. schools and whose are considered irregular or deviant."**

Considering the ways in which folx of color, and specifically womxn of color, are used as "canon fodder" (Morrison, 1988), we position this article as another point of disruption formed from a long history of people who have argued about the importance of expanding or even dismantling the idea of a Western literary canon. Particularly, we consider Morrison's argument, that

> what is astonishing in the contemporary debate is not the resistance to displacement of works or to the expansion of genre within it, but the virulent passion that accompanies this resistance and, more important, the quality of its defense weaponry. (p. 128)

In other words, we use this article to highlight the ca(n)non used against "deviant" literature in an effort to challenge the quality of the defense weaponry used to maintain whiteness in the literary curriculum. To do this, we present a discussion of an assignment we used with our preservice teachers (PSTs) and center the students' responses as well as our experiences with canonical literature to show the weakness of the canon's metaphorical artillery.

## "All of the Interests are Vested"

As mentioned above, we acknowledge that this isn't a new conversation, and we know that we are not the first to point out how the canon's defense weaponry exists primarily to defend "imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy" (hooks, 1994)—a term that Laverne Cox amended as "cisnormative heteronormative imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Cox, 2015). The canonical critique discussion of the 1980s laid bare the canon as the site of "a structural fatigue" where issues of representation and power "[shook] literary pedagogy in fundamental ways" (Guillory, 1987, p. 483). Nor are we the first to tie canonical critiques to English

language arts classrooms and/or English education programs (Bickmore et al., 2017; Dyches et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2017). The canon has been and continues to be a powerful shaping force of literature selection and literary pedagogy in ELA classrooms and ELA teacher preparation programs.

Many teacher educators and practicing teachers have adopted pedagogical approaches that are meant to challenge the canon's dominance in ELA classrooms (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Lechtenberg, 2018). The push for the inclusion of young adult literature in ELA classrooms, for example, calls for considerations of text relevance for youthful readers. However, too often, these pushes continue to center the canon and canonical texts as the end goal for readers. The sheer volume of practitioner and educator blogs, books, and articles (Eilish et al., 2014; Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016) that offer lists and ideas for pairing young adult literature with traditional canonical texts stand as a testament to the ways young adult literature is still being positioned in ELA classrooms as a rung on a ladder (Lesesne, 2010) or as a gateway that eventually leads readers to the pinnacle of "good reading": canonical texts. In these reading lists/pairings/ladders, YA literature is positioned as a necessary scaffold, an engaging hook, or an important prereading event that prepares young readers for whatever canonical text it is paired with. These kinds of canon critiques have an implicit acknowledgment of YA literature's ability to be directly relevant, interesting, and engaging for youth, but they stop short of actually disrupting the notion of the canon itself.

Other critiques of the canon attend more closely to issues of representation and whiteness, and two organizations—We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) and #DisruptTexts—are particularly worth noting because both movements have strong presences in academic, practitioner, and social media spaces. WNDB (2021) is a movement with grassroots social media-fueled beginnings. According to the WNDB website, the phrase We Need Diverse Books was originally used by Ellen Oh and Melinda Lo as a hashtag on Twitter to protest an all-white, all-male panel of authors at BookCon in 2014. Since then, WNDB has evolved into a non-profit organization that agitates and advocates for more diverse books, largely by focusing on holding publishers accountable for inequities in representation, supporting diverse authors through writing retreats, and providing outreach to schools. Additionally, WNDB created the Walter Dean Myers Award for Outstanding Children's Literature to recognize authors "whose works feature diverse main characters and address diversity in a meaningful way" (The Walter Awards, 2021, n.p.). The organization continues to have a strong social media presence (@diversebooks on Twitter), advocating for more diverse and representative texts with a focus on the children's literature publishing industry.

Although WNDB broadly promotes diverse texts, #DisruptTexts most explicitly pushes against the literary canon. #DisruptTexts was originally founded by Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena Germán, Kimberly N. Parker, and Julia Torres with an explicit goal of "challeng[ing] the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve" (#DisruptTexts, 2021). Largely focused on teacher education and professional development, the #DisruptTexts movement also has a robust social media presence. The core principles or calls to action that underpin the #DisruptTexts movement are: 1) the need for educators to consistently self-examine their own biases, 2) the importance of centering BIPOC voices as a direct response to the white

supremacy of the literary canon, 3) a call to center literary interpretation with critical frameworks and, 4) the need for anti-racist educators to work in the community to change systems of oppression (Ebarvia et al., 2020). The #DisruptTexts movement argues that as important as access to diverse texts is, equally important is what teachers do with them and how students engage with them (Ebarvia, 2019; The #DisruptTextsCollective, 2020).

Both WNDB and #DisruptTexts are committed to canon disruption, and their work underpins this article because we are concerned about how canonical texts defend exclusionary dominance. While we appreciate the work of those who apply critical lenses to the canonical texts most often taught in ELA classrooms, we would argue that the students in those classes are most likely to engage with meaningful discussions about race, gender, sexuality, and ability when the texts they engage with offer complex, diverse, and nuanced counternarratives to think with. As such, when we created the assignment we discuss here, our intention was to encourage preservice teachers to consider what stories they had been told in their own ELA classrooms, particularly whose stories were privileged, silenced, or missing.

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### Classroom Context and Assignment

The assignment we center in this article comes from a seminar course we co-designed for a teacher education program located at a public university in the southeastern United States (for more information on the course design, see Toliver & Hadley, 2021). Although we each taught a separate class, we collaboratively decided that the overall course would help the students to examine what it means to be a teaching professional in a diverse, pluralistic democracy. This meant that we would engage students in investigating ways to foster inclusive classrooms by helping them examine how they talked about, to, and with students, parents, and communities, and showing them the importance of implementing diverse instructional strategies and selecting diverse texts. Our classroom demographics mirrored the university population, as most of our students were middle and upper-class white women who came to the university from within the state. Across both classes, 34 students were enrolled, with 29 identifying as women and 5 identifying as men. Of the students, 31 identified as white, 2 identified as Black, and 1 identified as Latinx.

Throughout the course, we created space for the students to reflect on their readings, their student teaching experiences, and their past experiences with teachers and schools. One of the reflective assignments was an English Education Autobiography and Reimagining. The description of the autobiography assignment is as follows:

> Recount your past experiences in secondary English/language arts classes. I know that it has been a while, but the ways we were taught in the past influence the teachers we want to be in the future, so it is essential to reflect on your past experiences. For the first part of the assignment, I want to know about your

> former ELA teachers, the ones you liked, and the ones you were not particularly fond of. What made them good teachers, or what made them teachers that needed some extra professional development? Also, I want to know about the assignments you remember doing, those that were meaningful and thought-provoking and those that seemed like busywork. Lastly, create a list that includes the books you were assigned in your English classes. How did you feel about those books when you were in school? How do you feel about them now? This assignment is meant to push your thinking about the ways in which you were taught, so think deeply about how you were previously taught and how that may impact your thinking about teaching.

As shown in the description, this assignment had multiple parts: (1) commentary about former teachers, (2) examinations of past assignments, and (3) personal reflections on books assigned in school. We asked students to engage in this mode of reflection because we know that PSTs' school experiences impact how they approach teaching and learning, and we wanted students to deeply consider how their schooling past could possibly influence their teaching futures. Of course, we knew that our students might not remember every English/language arts teacher they had in middle and high school. We also knew that they might not remember every assignment or every book they read. However, we believed that whatever the students did remember would be important as they considered their future professional endeavors. We believed that the teachers our students remembered, the assignments they recalled, and the books they chose to include were important enough to our PSTs to share within the context of the assignment.

Upon reading the assignment responses, we began to notice that although there were several books many students mentioned, like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, there was no book that was included on every student's list. After noticing this trend, we decided to create a list with every book the PSTs included in the assignment (see Appendix A). Within the list, we made notations to identify which authors were women and/or which were Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, or Multiracial. We were uncertain about how the authors identified in terms of sexuality and ability status, so we did not include this information in order to avoid assumptions. Although this was a large task because we had to research several authors who were unfamiliar to us, we believed that creating the list and showing it to our students would help them to reconsider arguments about the upliftment of canonical literature and the denigration or erasure of young adult literature and literature written by people of color. We also believed that seeing the list, rather than hearing us talk about the benefits of challenging the canon, would alert them to the fact that many of the arguments surrounding the need for canonical literature could be debunked within their own collective reading histories. Specifically, if there are certain texts that all students have to read, then why weren't there any books that each student read across the two classes? If there are certain books that must be read in order to understand common literary allusions (e.g., Achilles' heel, Frankenstein's monster, Jekyll and Hyde), then how did the students survive college and the world without reading all of the books necessary to understand important references? If students must study certain books in order to gain proficiency over standardized literary tropes and

mechanics, then why were there books only one or two students read? How did they learn the same literary skills if they were not exposed to the same texts?

As instructors, we collectively considered these questions, but we also presented these questions to our students because we wanted them to consider the weaknesses in the argument for the traditional canon. We wanted them to think about whose empire is being constructed through the fortification of certain literary works and whose interests are served when some people and their writing are considered deviant, marginal, and devoid of literary merit. We wanted them to look at the list and think about which authors, books, and genres are treated as expendable in the war for students' literary imaginations.

## Disrupting Common Arguments

To further examine the list of books we created from the assignment, we started counting. We counted a total of 220 books listed across both of our classes, with 176 different authors represented. We were not familiar with several authors on the list, so we decided to search for information about those we did not know to better understand the numbers we saw. During our search, we found that of the 220 books, 57 were written by women authors (25.9%), 27 were written by authors of color (12.3%), and 14 were written by women of color (6.3%). From this list and our search, we observed the ways in which the canon is fortified in secondary schools, situating books written by and about people who are not white and male as canon fodder, as expendable. Books written by Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, and Multiracial people are forced to battle against seemingly hopeless odds in an effort to achieve the strategic goal of creating "exemplary students." However, we also observed some cracks in the stronghold, weak points that can and must be addressed if we are to continue on the path of disruption, if we are to ensure that the canon's empire does not hold refuge in schooling spaces.

Thus, it is within this section that we attend to the canon's fragility by dismantling common arguments used to fortify the canon in English classrooms. The arguments we cite within this article were primarily gleaned from conversations with our students, but we have also heard these comments in discussions with our former high school colleagues and current higher education associates. We have seen these arguments across blog posts, news articles, opinion editorials, and media broadcasts. We begin each section with the phrase, common argument, because these arguments are habitual, ordinary, and customary, traversing across time, across classrooms, and across ELA scholarship. Because these arguments cross time and space, we dispel these arguments by centering the list we created from the assignment as well as our personal experiences as teachers and teacher educators.

### Common Argument 1: Canonical texts are books of the highest quality

One of the common arguments that is often made in defense of canonical texts is that they are the best examples of great literature. Canon defenders point to the complexity of narrative and sentence structures, and they admire the subtlety of character development in canonical novels. Our argument here is not to say that these canonical texts lack complexity and literary genius as currently defined, but instead, we wish to ask: Why is complexity and literary genius currently defined in this way? Whose literary traditions, narrative structures, and creative imageries are excluded because the definition of "great literature" is so tightly tied up in this particular

canon? When we taught in public school ELA classrooms, we often heard teachers defend their canonical text selections by asserting that canonical texts were classified as such because they required students to develop and practice critical thinking, and they invited students to ask big questions about responsibility, empathy, and humanity. The argument sounds compelling, of course, but we wondered if and how our PSTs (and our own) experiences with assigned canonical texts might provide a counterargument to this very common assertion.

First, as we mentioned above, not a single work had been universally assigned to our students. Books that we expected to have been universally read—like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is a standard feature of most 9th grade ELA curricula—had been assigned reading in most but not all of our PSTs' ELA classrooms (See Table 1). We have no argument with the lack of uniformity, of course, as we will argue long and loud about how recent moves to standardize ELA classrooms restrict the kind of flexibility and professionalism that is essential to create conditions for responsive and relevant pedagogy and effective teaching. What we would point to, perhaps, is the discourse of dominance that is apparent in the list of the most commonly assigned texts. Even a glance at the top fifteen most assigned texts makes clear that a certain type of "quality" literature is being valued in ELA classrooms. No authors of color and only two women authors made the top fifteen most commonly assigned texts list. When all of the examples of "quality" literature center a certain world viewpoint, we have to wonder if "quality" is a not-so-subtle code for dominance. We wonder, too, if the push to almost solely select canonical texts in ELA classrooms is a push to maintain the status quo. Maintaining the status quo, quite frankly, does not require the deep critical thinking and praxis that the defenders of the canon promise will be a by-product of reading canonical texts.

As we further reflected on the argument that canonical texts are books that every high school student in the nation should read because of the texts' intrinsic intellectual, societal, and literary merit, we also realized that there were books on the most commonly assigned text list that we ourselves, as English education professors, had never read. Stephanie, for example, has never read *The Great Gatsby* or *Heart of Darkness*. Heidi has never read *Fahrenheit 451* or *The Outsiders*. Neither of us has read *The Things They Carried*. It should be noted that we began to read several of the titles we mention in high school, but at some point, we gave up because we simply could not force ourselves through them. As

**Table 1**

*Books with Over 10 Reads (Between the 2 Classes)*

| Title | # of students who listed the title (n=34) |
|---|---|
| *The Great Gatsby* | 26 |
| *Romeo and Juliet* | 24 |
| *To Kill A Mockingbird* | 21 |
| *The Odyssey* | 18 |
| *The Scarlet Letter* | 18 |
| *Lord of the Flies* | 16 |
| *Heart of Darkness* | 15 |
| *The Things They Carried* | 13 |
| *Animal Farm* | 12 |
| *Hamlet* | 12 |
| *Night* | 12 |
| *Beowulf* | 11 |
| *Fahrenheit 451* | 11 |
| *The Outsiders* | 11 |
| *1984* | 10 |
| *The Crucible* | 10 |

avid readers, we did not see what made these texts so great. We would assert, with perhaps a little tongue in cheek, that we have managed to be well-read, well-educated, empathetic, and productive members of society even having never read these specific texts. We are still able to survive and thrive in academic spaces even without having read these staples of literary "quality."

The argument that canonical books—written largely by white men—are canonical because of their intrinsic literary quality—the definition of which has largely been determined by white men—was addressed succinctly and powerfully by Toni Morrison. She asked, "What use is it to go on about 'quality' being the only criterion for greatness knowing that the definition of quality is itself the subject of much rage and is seldom universally agreed upon by everyone at all times?" (Morrison, 1988, pp. 124-125). In other words, literary greatness is determined by the reader, and it is a measure that cannot be agreed upon by every person across time. F. Scott Fitzgerald received posthumous acclaim for his literary prowess. During his life, Shakespeare's histories were more widely praised than his tragedies or comedies. And yet, we continue to note the importance of their works across time and space as if they had always received the moniker "high quality" literature. We use these examples to note that complexity and literary genius can change across time and among different groups of people. Thus, the common argument that situates literary quality as the driving force of the canonical empire is weakened.

**"In other words, literary greatness is determined by the readers, and it is a measure that cannot be agreed upon by every person across time."**

**Common Argument 2: Canonical texts are essential for understanding allusions**

Common Core State Standards require that by the end of 7th grade, students must be able to "interpret figures of speech (e.g., literary, biblical, and mythological allusions) in context" and that by the end of 8th grade, they should be able to analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts" (Common Core State Standards). By definition, an allusion is a direct or indirect reference to an important person, place, event, statement, or theme found in texts. Considering this description, understanding allusions should not only help students to attain ELA mastery as decided by the state, but they should also help them to make connections across texts over time. What we noticed through the book list, however, is that a number of our students did not read the texts deemed essential for understanding allusions. Many were introduced to texts that are often alluded to in other literary spaces, like *The Odyssey*, *The Great Gatsby*, T*he Scarlet Letter*, *Lord of the Flies*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Still, others were not, and yet, they were students in a teacher education program who had made it to their senior year and were on track to graduate. They were pre-service teachers who would hopefully have their own classrooms a year after they left our classes.

That specific allusions are deemed necessary to succeed in secondary school, but a number of our PSTs were succeeding without them, made us pause. How could an argument about the importance of centering certain texts for the purpose of building

awareness of allusions hold if preservice English teachers, people who would be teaching allusions in their future classrooms, had not read the texts required to find important references? How would they be able to teach students to find allusions if they were not familiar with the references themselves? These questions forced us to consider other possibilities for maintaining the argument, and we found an idea Morrison (1988) named over thirty years ago. She argued that

> the present turbulence [about the canon] seems not to be about the flexibility of a canon, its range among and between Western countries, but about its miscegenation. The word is informative here and I do mean its use. A powerful ingredient in this debate concerns the incursion of third-world or so-called minority literature into a Eurocentric stronghold. (Morrison, 1988, p. 129)

In considering Morrison's statement, we see the maintenance of the allusion argument as ensuring the consistent referencing of people, places, events, statements, and themes, found in white literature, a means to stop the incursion of diverse literature on the Eurocentric stronghold that surrounds K-12 education. With the dismal number of texts written by and about people of color included on the list, we had to ask ourselves: whose allusions must be known? Whose people, places, events, statements, or themes are considered important enough to teach and analyze?

Often, we have heard our teacher colleagues and PSTs pose variations of the following questions: How will students understand the significance of the Greek gods and goddesses in Shakespeare's work if they have never read about them? How will students understand how Melinda feels in the novel *Speak* if they do not know the connection made between Melinda and Hester Prynne? How will students understand the philosophical context of Thoreau's *Walden* if they have never studied *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad*? Questions like these work alongside the state mandates and set the stage for explicit instruction that centers whiteness. It solidifies the canon's defenses because it assumes that if students do not study literature written by and about white people and white history, they will not be prepared to succeed. We challenge this common argument by asking: how will our students understand Amanda Gorman's poetry without reading and understanding the important work of Maya Angelou, Frederick Douglass, or Claudia Rankine? Countering the argument with this question allows us to see the weakness in the canon's armor. The allusion argument is not just used to ensure that students are better equipped to interpret figures of speech or analyze the impact of word choices on a text's meaning because all texts are not considered important enough to reference. In this way, the allusion argument is meant to fortify the Eurocentric stronghold and block the interbreeding of text and thought across time.

**Common Argument 3: Canonical books teach overarching themes and literary traditions in ways that other books cannot**

Another common argument we hear is that canonical novels uniquely address themes or societal issues in ways that cannot be replicated by other books. We have heard this argument for many of the texts most commonly read by our PSTs. For example, *The Great Gatsby* is often described as the go-to text to discuss The American Dream; *To Kill a Mockingbird* is positioned as the text to open conversations about inequity and racism. Other common examples might

be *Huckleberry Finn,* which addresses interracial friendships, or *Romeo and Juliet,* which introduces young people to the complex and gorgeous language of Shakespeare with the relatable theme of teenage love. We wonder why these overarching themes and literary traditions are considered indispensable in ELA classrooms: Why is The American Dream as represented in *The Great Gatsby* considered to be a more important and compelling take on that dream than its representation in *Invisible Man*? Why are books that center predominantly white and male characters the go-to texts for examining our collective experiences?

One of the most interesting features of this argument is how many of these texts seemingly address serious issues of equity with regards to race, class, and gender. And yet, these pillars of the canon overwhelmingly center "cisnormative heteronormative imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Cox, 2015) as the frame of reference for these conversations. It seems ironic that *To Kill a Mockingbird,* a novel that many teachers argue allows them to have the most meaningful conversations about racial equality, is written by a white woman about a white family's response to that inequality. The Black characters in the novel are the least complicated characters and often exist to serve as texture that serves the white characters' development. *Huckleberry Finn* certainly can be subjected to similar critiques, although apologists argue that the deep friendship between Huck and Jim is redemptive enough to outweigh the use of racial slurs and the deeply embedded racist understandings of Black people. While *The Great Gatsby* might offer a searing critique of Jay Gatsby's inability to achieve The American Dream because of classism, Jay Gatsby—a newly wealthy white man—is not representative of the intersectional and intertwining inequalities that many youth experience as they consider the complexities of what it means to dream in the United States, what it means to have a dream deferred in the context of America.

**"When we disrupt the canon, we are looking for books that extend beyond what canonical texts can do and have done; we are looking for books that open space."**

The argument that these canonical texts are the best texts for exploring a shared humanity rests on the premise that humanity is universal, and that human emotions, human behaviors, and human experiences are widely shared and faced in similar ways. However, the WNDB and #DisruptTexts movements start with a different assumption altogether, as they acknowledge that the experience of being a human is deeply and uniquely influenced by social (and socially constructed) identities and youth should have access to texts that accurately reflect and represent that unique experience. We would argue that a conversation about oppression that doesn't center the humanity of those most affected by that inequality is a conversation that is less about disrupting inequality and more about offering space for dominant groups to work through their emotions about their own complicity in those inequalities (see Matias, 2016 for a more substantial analysis of how the emotions of whiteness intersect and interfere with education for equity). Certainly, Toni Morrison asks us to complicate these ideas when she says, "There is something called American literature that, according to conventional wisdom, is certainly not Chicano literature, or Afro-American literature, or Asian-American, or Native American, or . . . It is

somehow separate from them and they from it" (Morrison, 2016, p. 124). Each of these identities share an American experience while being excluded from American literature, and they also have specific cultural locations that deserve space in literary representations of the larger American experience. When we talk about disrupting the canon, we are not looking for books written by diverse authors that will allow the exact same conversations and ideas that exist within the canon. When we disrupt the canon, we are looking for books that extend beyond what canonical texts can do and have done; we are looking for books that open space for more conversations that have been ignored or excluded by the canon.

**In Defense of Canonical Casualties**

In analyzing the list of books created by the PSTs responses and in examining our own experiences with canonical texts in schools, we see the argument for the canon as one not based on the need for high quality literature, the development of background knowledge to understand allusions, or the idea that canonical books are best used to tackle certain subjects. Instead, we see the upliftment of the canon as one that centers the need, development, and ideas of whiteness. The fortification of whiteness creates several assumptions—(1) that there is no high quality literature outside of the Eurocentric canon; (2) that literature written by people who are not white men is inferior; (3) that literature written by diverse Others is only of high quality if it meets Eurocentric standards; and (4) that the literature of diverse Others is "not so much 'art' as ore—rich ore—that requires a Western or Eurocentric smith to refine it from its 'natural' state into an aesthetically complex form" (Morrison, 1988, pp. 129-130). The fortification of the canon, then, defends the Eurocentric empire that controls ELA classrooms and ensures the regulation and/or refinement of "savage" literary works. It creates a means to reify whiteness as the standard to which all others must be measured, and it places the literary works of those who fall outside of the Eurocentric idea on the front lines, awaiting their eventual demise. Diverse literature, the "savage" other, is forced into a war against canonical texts, and the odds for victory are not in their favor. There will be many casualties because educators consistently use these common arguments as weapons set to shoot diverse literature on site.

Of course, we are not saying that all teachers use this argumentative artillery, especially since there are many who are influenced by the ideas of WNDB and #DisruptTexts. These movements have pushed educators to think about challenging the canon, make space for diverse literature, and advocate for stories and authors that reflect the identities of all who exist within society. However, we must acknowledge that although some teachers are on the front lines fighting for diverse texts and putting their own bodies and careers on the line, there are many others who continue to shoot them down. We also acknowledge that there are teachers who attempt to mitigate the problem by situating diverse texts as support toward the sacred goal of canonical texts. In turn, diverse books are granted the privilege of being canonical allies that uphold the Eurocentric fortress. However, as Morrison (1988) reminds us, allowing diverse texts to exist only to support canonical texts can "confine the discourse to the advocacy of diversification within the canon and/or a kind of benign coexistence near or within reach of the already sacred texts" (Morrison, 1988, p. 134-135). That is, using diverse texts as support still centers Eurocentricity, as the canon becomes the benevolent benefactor that allows diverse books to survive or exist, as the diverse books are always waiting to be

granted a sacred space on the canon's hallowed coattails.

Thus, we highlight common arguments and showcase their weaknesses by getting at the root of the concerns, by naming whiteness and refusing to let it hide behind the canon's ever-present fortress. We situate this paper and the included conversations as a means to show the canon's fragility, to centralize how the foundation upon which the canon is built is not as strong as we consistently position it to be. We present these arguments as disruption, a means to drastically alter the structure of the conversation and cause radical change by showcasing how even though whiteness is never explicitly named, it has infiltrated the cannons, forced itself into the bullets, and situated itself as weaponry that shoots through the metaphorical bodies of diverse books. We are not arguing against a canon, for we know there will always be a canon because it is beneficial for professional and educational communities to have one, and we know that some students will choose to read these texts; however, we are saying that it is vital for us to disrupt how we think about and teach canonical works. We are saying that the arguments used to defend the canon's empire are not as strong as some wish them to be. We are saying that whiteness dominates the canon as well as the arguments that uplift it and that these arguments, like the canon, must be disrupted to ensure that diverse texts are canon fodder no more.

**"Our practice is always tied up with dominance because the American educational experience itself is currently—and always has been—tied up with dominance."**

## Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to disrupt common arguments that uplift the canon by centering the data provided by our students as well as our personal experiences as teacher educators. In doing so, we hope to provide more ammunition against the defensive weaponry the canon has acquired over time. We have centered our arguments around the idea of disruption because we believe that previous efforts to expand or supplement the canon have continued to uplift the canon's place of dominance in ELA classrooms. Further, we have centered the arguments of Toni Morrison very purposefully because we wish to pay homage to her role in disrupting the canon, both in the literature she wrote and in the arguments she brought forward about the need for canon disruption. The Black scholars who wrote the praisesong for Toni Morrison noted that "all the literate world knows Toni Morrison" (par. 8), and they acknowledged that her work "advanced the moral and artistic standards by which we must measure the daring and the love of our national imagination and our collective intelligence as a people" (par. 11). We believe that all the academic world knows of Toni Morrison, and even though her work has advanced our thinking and imagination, she has yet to be centralized in canon arguments within the field of education. We seek to disrupt this issue.

Thus, in returning to Morrison (1988) one final time, we agree with her that "resistance to displacement within or expansion of a canon, is not after all, surprising or unwarranted" (p. 128). For ELA educators, who often choose the profession because of their own affinity for and connection with canonical texts, that resistance might be amplified. We ourselves have experienced moments of

discomfort around our own past text selections, and we would argue that discomfort or defensiveness can signal a place where we might examine our own teaching practices and beliefs. One of the things that is so uncomfortable about being a teacher is that our practice is always tied up with dominance because the American educational experience itself is currently—and always has been—tied up with dominance. Untying those knots can be uncomfortable and even painful as we grapple with the ways that we have been and are complicit in maintaining and often reifying dominance. Naming and reframing the common arguments against canon disruption is just a first step; more important and critical work must be done individually and collectively by teachers as they consider how the texts selected in their classrooms might be weaponized in defense of or in the disruption of the canon, with all that is implied in both of those stances.

Text selection is a political act, as ELA educators have the power to exclude, avoid, or uplift diverse texts in favor of upholding the canonical empire. So, when we think about the questions that might best guide our decisions about text selection, we consider those we ask ourselves when we have the privilege to decide which texts to bring into the classroom space:

1. When considering literary merit, on whose authority are we measuring quality?
2. In teaching allusion, whose cultural, historical, and personal references are we centering? Whose are we ignoring?
3. In planning for thematic instruction, which books and authors are we using to teach those themes? Who is left out of those conversations?
4. If using a canonical text, what is our reason for centering it? Are there other texts that can extend the conversation beyond the limits of that canonical work?

Centering these questions holds us accountable to our commitment to align our teaching practice with our beliefs that the texts we read in our classrooms matter. The choices we make surrounding our text selection, and the arguments we give to support or justify that selection, can reinscribe dominant narratives and ways of being. Or, it can challenge, disrupt, and make new ways of being possible. Since we know that canon building is empire building and canon defense is national defense, we end this article with two questions: Whose empires are we building? Whose nations are we defending?

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**Appendix A**

Cumulative Book List

| | Author | Book | Number of times mentioned in Toliver's class out of 17 students | Number of times mentioned in Hadley's class out of 17 students | Total Across Classes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Achebe, Chinua | Things Fall Apart | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 2. | Adler, Elizabeth | The King's Shadow | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 3. | Albom, Mitch | Tuesdays with Morrie | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 4. | Alighieri, Dante | Inferno | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| 5. | Allende, Isabel $# | The House of Spirits | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 6. | Anderson, Laurie Halse | Fever 1793 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 7. | Anderson, Laurie Halse | Speak | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 8. | Anderson, Sherwood | Winesburg, Ohio | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 9. | Angelou, Maya | I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 10. | Atwood, Margaret | The Handmaid's Tale | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 11. | Avi | The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 12. | Austen, Jane | Pride and Prejudice | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. | Austen, Jane | Northanger Abbey | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 14. | Beah, Ishmael | A Long Way Gone | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 15. | Blackwood, Gary | The Shakespeare Stealer | 0 | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. | Bloom, Harold & Rosenberg, David | Book of J | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 17. | Boom, Corrie ten | The Hiding Place | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 18. | Bradbury, Ray | Fahrenheit 451 | 6 | 5 | 11 |
| 19. | Bronte, Charlotte | Jane Eyre | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| 20. | Bronte, Emily | Wuthering Heights | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 21. | Bruchac, Joseph | Code Talker | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 22. | Bryson, Bill | A Walk in the Woods | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 23. | Burns, Olive Ann | Cold Sassy Tree | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 24. | Camus, Albert | The Stranger | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 25. | Capote, Truman | In Cold Blood | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | Card, Orson Scott | Ender's Game | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 27. | Chaucer, Geoffrey | Canterbury Tales | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| 28. | Chrichton, Michael | Jurassic Park | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 29. | Christie, Agatha | And Then There Were None | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 30. | Christie, Agatha | Murder on the Orient Express | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 31. | Chopin, Kate | The Awakening | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 32. | Cisneros, Sandra | The House on Mango Street | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 33. | Coelho, Paulo | The Alchemist | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 34. | Collier, Christopher & James Lincoln | My Brother Sam is Dead | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 35. | Collins, Suzanne | The Hunger Games | 0 | 2 | 2 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36. Conrad, Joseph | Heart of Darkness | 6 | 9 | 15 |
| 37. Cornwell, Bernard | The Last Kingdom | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 38. Crane, Stephen | The Red Badge of Courage | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 39. Creech, Sharon | Ruby Holler | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 40. Creech, Sharon | Walk Two Moons | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 41. Crew, Linda $ | Children of the River | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 42. Curtis, Christopher Paul | Bud, Not Buddy | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 43. Curtis, Christopher Paul | The Watsons Go to Birmingham | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 44. Dickens, Charles | A Christmas Carol | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 45. Dickens, Charles | Great Expectations | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 46. Dickens, Charles | A Tale of Two Cities | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| 47. Doctorow, E.L. | Ragtime | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 48. Dostoyevsky, Fyodor | Crime and Punishment | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 49. Dostoyevsky, Fyodor | Notes from the Underground | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 50. Douglass, Frederick | Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 51. Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan | The Hound of Baskervilles | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 52. Dunn, Mark | Ella Minnow Pea | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 53. Ellison, Ralph | Invisible Man | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 54. Enger, Leif | Peace Like a River | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 55. Erdich, Louise | Love Medicine | 0 | 1 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 56. Euripedes | Medea | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 57. Faulkner, William | As I Lay Dying | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| 58. Faulkner, William | The Sound and the Fury | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 59. Fitzgerald, F. Scott | The Great Gatsby | 11 | 15 | 26 |
| 60. Fitzgerald, F. Scott | Tender is the Night | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 61. Fleischman, Paul | Seedfolks | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 62. Fleischman, Paul | Whirligig | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 63. Forster, E.M. | A Room with a View | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 64. Foster, Thomas | How to Read Literature Like a Professor | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 65. Frank, Anne | The Diary of Anne Frank | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| 66. Fridgen, Michael | The Iron Words | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 67. Gaines, Ernest | A Lesson before Dying | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 68. Gardner, John | Grendel | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 69. Gladwell, Malcolm | Outliers | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 70. Golding, William | Lord of the Flies | 7 | 9 | 16 |
| 71. Goldman, William | The Princess Bride | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 72. Gordimer, Nadine | My Son's Story | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 73. Griffiths, W.G. | Malchus | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 74. Haddix, Margaret Peterson | Running out of Time | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 75. Haddon, Mark | The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime | 0 | 1 | 1 |

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| 76. Hansberry, Lorraine | A Raisin in the Sun | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 77. Hardy, Thomas | Tess of the D'Ubervilles, A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 78. Harling, Robert | Steel Magnolias | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 79. Hawthorne, Nathaniel | The Scarlet Letter | 8 | 12 | 18 |
| 80. Heller, Joseph | Catch 22 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 81. Hemingway, Ernest | A Farewell to Arms | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 82. Hemingway, Ernest | The Old Man and the Sea | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 83. Hemingway, Ernest | The Sun Also Rises | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 84. Hesse, Hermann | Demian | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 85. Hesse, Hermann | Siddhartha | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 86. Hesse, Hermann | Steppenwolf | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 87. Hesse, Karen | Out of the Dust | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 88. Hiaasen, Carl | Hoot | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 89. Hickam, Homer | October Sky | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| 90. Hinton, S.E. | The Outsiders | 1 | 10 | 11 |
| 91. Holt, Kimberly Willis | When Zachary Beaver Came to Town | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 92. Homer | Iliad | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 93. Homer | The Odyssey | 7 | 11 | 18 |
| 94. Hosseini, Khaled | A Thousand Splendid Suns | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 95. Hosseini, Khaled | The Kite Runner | 1 | 0 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 96. Hunt, Irene | The Lottery Rose | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 97. Hurston, Zora Neal | Their Eyes Were Watching God | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 98. Huxley, Aldous | Brave New World | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 99. Ibsen, Henrik | A Doll's House | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 100. Ibsen, Henrik | Hedda Gabler | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 101. Jiang, Ji-li | Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 102. Kafka, Franz | The Metamorphosis | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 103. Kesey, Ken | One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 104. Keys, Daniel | Flowers for Algernon | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 105. Kidd, Sue Monk | The Secret Life of Bees | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 106. Kingsolver, Barbara | The Poisonwood Bible | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 107. Kipling, Rudyard | The Jungle Book | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 108. Knowles, John | A Separate Peace | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 109. Koller, Jackie French | The Primrose Way | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 110. Konigsburg, E.L. | The View from Saturday | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 111. Krakauer, Jon | Into the Wild | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 112. Lahiri, Jhumpa | Interpreter of Maladies | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 113. L'Engle, Madeleine | A Wrinkle in Time | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 114. Lee, Harper | To Kill a Mockingbird | 7 | 14 | 21 |
| 115. Levine, Gail Carson | Ella Enchanted | 1 | 0 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 116. Lewis, C.S. | The Chronicles of Narnia | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 117. London, Jack | The Call of the Wild | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 118. London, Jack | White Fang | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 119. Lord, Walter | A Night to Remember | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 120. Lowry, Lois | The Giver | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| 121. Lowry, Lois | Number the Stars | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 122. Mallery, Susan | Three Sisters | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 123. Marjane, Satrapi | Persepolis | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 124. Marquez, Gabriel Garcia | 100 Years of Solitude | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 125. Martel, Yann | Life of Pi | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 126. Mass, Wendy | A Mango-Shaped Space | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 127. McCarthy, Cormac | The Road | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 128. McCourt, Frank | Angela's Ashes | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 129. Melville, Herman | Billy Budd | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 130. Miller, Arthur | The Crucible | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| 131. Miller, Arthur | Death of a Salesman | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 132. Milton, John | Paradise Lost | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 133. Morrison, Toni | Beloved | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 134. Morrison, Toni | The Bluest Eye | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 135. Morrison, Toni | Song of Solomon | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| 136. Nichols, Mike | Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf | 1 | 0 | 1 |

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| 137. O'Brien, Tim | The Things They Carried | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| 138. Orwell, George | 1984 | 7 | 3 | 10 |
| 139. Orwell, George | Animal Farm | 4 | 8 | 12 |
| 140. Patchett, Ann | Bel Canto | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 141. Paton, Alan | Cry, Beloved Country | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 142. Patterson, Katherine | Bridge to Terabithia | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 143. Paulsen, Gary | Hatchet | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 144. Pearce, Donn | Cool Hand Luke | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 145. The Pearl Poet | Sir Gawain and the Green Knight | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 146. Peck, Richard | A Year Down Yonder | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 147. Philbrick, Rodman | Freak the Mighty | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 148. Plath, Sylvia | The Bell Jar | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 149. Potok, Chaim | The Chosen | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 150. Potok, Chaim | My Name is Asher Lev | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 151. Proulx, Annie | The Shipping News | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 152. Rand, Ayn | Anthem | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 153. Rand, Ayn | The Fountainhead | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 154. Rawls, Wilson | Where the Red Fern Grows | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 155. Remarque, Enrich Maria | All Quiet on the Western Front | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 156. Renault, Mary | The King Must Die | 1 | 0 | 1 |

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| 157. Riordan, Rick | Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 158. Rose, Reginald | 12 Angry Men | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 159. Roy, Arundhati | The God of Small Things | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 160. Rutherfurd, Edward | London | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 161. Ryan, Pam Munoz | Esperanza Rising | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 162. Sachar, Louis | Holes | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 163. Salinger, J.D. | Catcher in the Rye | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| 164. Schlosser, Eric | Fast Food Nation | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 165. Sedaris, David | Me Talk Pretty One Day | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 166. Shakespeare | As You Like It | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 167. Shakespeare | Hamlet | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| 168. Shakespeare | Julius Caesar | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| 169. Shakespeare | Macbeth | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 170. Shakespeare | Merchant of Venice | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 171. Shakespeare | A Midsummer Night's Dream | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| 172. Shakespeare | Othello | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| 173. Shakespeare | Romeo & Juliet | 11 | 13 | 24 |
| 174. Shakespeare | The Taming of the Shrew | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 175. Shakespeare | The Tempest | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 176. Shakespeare | Titus and Andronicus | 1 | 0 | 1 |

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| 177. Shelley, Mary | Frankenstein | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| 178. Shepherd, Jean | A Christmas Story | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 179. Shute, Nevil | A Town Like Alice | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 180. Skloot, Rebecca | The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 181. Small, David | Stitches | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 182. Sophocles | Antigone | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 183. Sophocles | Oedipus Rex | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 184. Spark, Muriel | The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 185. Spiegelman, Art | Maus | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 186. Steinbeck, John | East of Eden | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 187. Steinbeck, John | Of Mice and Men | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| 188. Steinbeck, John | The Grapes of Wrath | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 189. Steinbeck, John | The Red Pony | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 190. Stoker, Bramm | Dracula | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 191. Stowe, Harriet Beecher | Uncle Tom's Cabin | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 192. Swift, Jonathan | Gulliver's Travels | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 193. Taylor, Mildred | Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 194. Taylor, Theodore | The Cay | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 195. Thoreau, Henry David | Walden | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 196. Tolkien, J.R.R. | The Hobbit | 0 | 1 | 1 |

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| 197. Tolstoy, Leo | Anna Karenina | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 198. Twain, Mark | The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 199. Twain, Mark | Huckleberry Finn | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| 200. Tyler, Anne | Dinner at Homesick Restaurant | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 201. Walls, Jeannette & Corral, Rodrigo | The Glass Castle | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 202. Walker, Alice | The Color Purple | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 203. Wells, H.G. | The Time Machine | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 204. Wharton, Edith | The Age of Innocence | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 205. Wharton, Edith | Ethan Frome | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 206. Wiesel, Elie | Night | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| 207. Wilde, Oscar | The Importance of Being Earnest | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 208. Wilde, Oscar | The Picture of Dorian Gray | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 209. Wilder, Laura Ingalls | Little House on the Prairie | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 210. Williams, Laura E. | Behind the Bedroom Wall | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 211. Williams, Tennessee | The Glass Menagerie | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 212. Williams, Tennessee | A Streetcar Named Desire | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 213. Willis, Connie | To Say Nothing of the Dog | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 214. Wright, Richard | Native Son | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 215. Unknown | Beowulf | 5 | 6 | 11 |
| 216. Unknown | The Epic of Gilgamesh | 0 | 1 | 1 |

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| 217. Virgil | Aeneid | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 218. Voltaire | Candide | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 219. Zamyatin, Yevgeny | We | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 220. Zusak, Mark | The Book Thief | 1 | 2 | 3 |