

CRITICAL GLOBAL LITERACIES

BOGUM YOON, *Column Editor*

Kathy G. Short discusses the importance of challenging students to move beyond a tourist perspective in understanding the world and suggests pairing global young adult (YA) literature with classic texts.

Globalizing Literature in the English Language Arts Classroom

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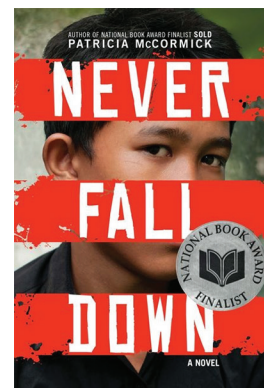
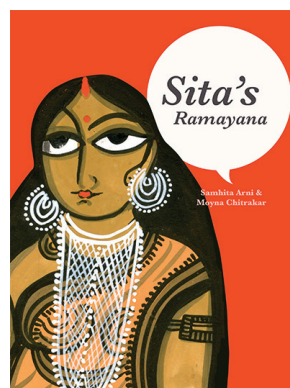
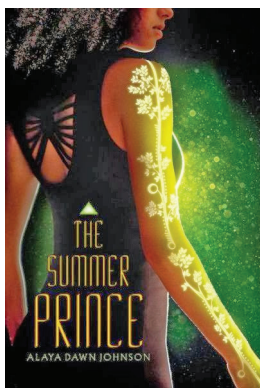
Teachers always search for new ways to challenge students and expand their understandings of themselves and the world. Even though the classics serve as a foundation in literature classrooms, teachers recognize the need for broader cultural perspectives that reflect the diversity of the global society in which teens live. They recognize that classics often reflect biases against women and people of color and include dated language and confusing writing styles due to obscure expressions

and unfamiliar sentence constructions. They also know that few classics have teens as main characters, but they struggle to make major changes in the curriculum since these canonical texts are usually mandated reading. One way for teachers to increase relevancy and globalize reading is to pair the required classics with young adult global literature. The pairings shared in this column bring more diverse literature into the curriculum and, at the same time, create a context for understanding the classic work and its relevance for teens.

Global literature provides an opportunity for students to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining only surface-level information about a culture. Because literature expands students' life spaces, they travel outside the boundaries of

their lives to other places, times, and ways of living in the world. They immerse themselves in story worlds to gain insights about how people around the world live, feel, and think—and so develop empathy as well as knowledge. Through global literature, students are challenged to understand those who differ from themselves, breaking cycles of oppression and prejudice. As they read books from global cultures, students reflect in new ways on their own cultures as well as the world beyond themselves. Students see how people of the world view themselves, not just how we view them.

To explore the possibilities of pairing global YA literature with classic books, a group of us at Worlds of Words took the complexity exemplar lists of fiction and nonfiction from the Common




Core and searched for global literature with similar complexity and themes/plots. We selected the Common Core exemplar lists since these have been widely referenced as a core reading list and include many well-known classics. In addition to the pairings, we located other strong global young adult books and so created additional recommended global lists. These extensive fiction and non-fiction lists, along with complexity information and plot descriptions, are available at wowlit.org.

We are exploring a range of ways to integrate these paired books into classrooms. Here are a few ideas.

- Pair a classic text with a global book—students can read the YA novel first as an entry to the classic or read the classic first to use the YA novel as a connection to students' lives. Or half the class can read the classic and half the global novel, with each group discussing its book and then meeting in pairs to make comparisons across the books.
 - Pair F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* with Mirjam Pressler's *Let Sleeping Dogs Lie*, a contemporary novel about a German teen who learns that her family's successful business was stolen by the Nazis from a Jewish family. Or pair it with Alaya Dawn Johnson's *The Summer Prince*, set in a futuristic Brazil ruled by technology and tradition, where oppression lies beneath the city's glitter.
- *The Odyssey* by Homer can be paired with Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana*, a graphic novel retelling of an ancient legend from India in which Rama forces his wife Sita to undergo an ordeal by fire to prove herself. This pairing connects well-known Greek mythology with Hindu mythology and invites comparisons across cultures.
- Another type of pairing is an informational book, such as *Hitler Youth* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti, about the youth organizations Hitler used to meet his sociopolitical goals, with a novel on the Holocaust to provide an informational context. Or pair *What the World Eats* by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio, which contains photos of twenty-five families in twenty-one countries to show what they eat in one day, with a novel on economic disparity, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*.
 - Read a classic text and then invite students to select from thematically related global books to form small groups for discussions.
 - After reading *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, offer YA novels about the consequences of war, such as Ruta Sepetys's *Salt to the Sea*, set at the end of World War II as refugees flee the advancing Soviet army; Geert Spillebeen's *Kipling's Choice*, a fictionalized biography of Kipling's son who dies in agony during World War I; Keely Hutton's *Soldier Boy* set in early 1990s Uganda about an enslaved child soldier forced into the guerilla army of a warlord; and Patricia McCormick's *Never Fall Down* about a child soldier forced to serve the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.
 - *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck could be read with YA novels about racism, poverty, and desperation around the world, such as *The Queen of Water* by Laura Resau and Maria Virginia Farinango, set in Ecuador where a teen returns to her Indigenous village after years of being a servant for a wealthy family; Michael Williams's *Now Is the Time for Running*, the story of a teen who escapes a massacre in Zimbabwe and faces racism in his journey to find safety; Fatima Sharafedine's *The Servant* is set in Lebanon where a teen is sent from her poor village to the city to serve a wealthy couple; and J. L. Powers's *This Thing Called the Future* is about a Zulu teen in South Africa, growing up in poverty and the AIDs epidemic, who is caught in the clash between traditional and modern beliefs.
- The reading of a classic can be followed by independent reading selected from global YA novels connected to the

classic. After reading Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, students could read from science fiction, such as L. J. Adlington's *The Diary of Pelly D*, historical fiction about fascism, such as Sepetys's *Between Shades of Gray*, or about book banning, such as Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, or novels on identity, such as Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy*.

Another possibility is to change the curriculum and replace several canonical texts with YA global literature. Bringing global literature into our classrooms opens students' minds to difference as a

rich resource, not a problem, while inviting critical engagement. Literature provides a safe place to explore cultural diversity and to develop empathy, instead of negatively judging people whose values or ways of living differ from our own. Through global literature, students come to understand their current lives and imagine beyond themselves. 

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Mementos

I would not trade my
petrified wood for your
bombardier beetle,
Easter Island walking stick,
celt from an Illinois farm
or green ammonite.
This object's story is mine.

—MATTHEW J. SPIRENG

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