

Five Tips to Make a More Inclusive Canon Today

1. **Read a YA text and conduct a literary analysis.** Search for all literary terms listed in your school’s standards or the CCSS and do a deep-dive study, line by line, of the opening pages of a YA text. Share these findings with colleagues and develop a comprehensive guide of literary terms and questions to show any folks who question the literariness of a text.
 - a. Keep an open eye and note where you get stuck on “how” a certain literary term should reveal itself. How is this YA text’s use of the craft technique just as valid?
 - b. Use the literary analysis section of Lyn Fairchild Hawks’ thesis, [“But Is YA Literary? The Search for an Abundant Canon,” beginning on page 30](#), as a guide to your process.
 - c. If you’re making a rationale to those who use the same literary terms but don’t believe they exist in a YA text—or, who actually don’t know how to do a line-by-line analysis to counter your argument—bring a detailed table or annotation showing literary terms in action.
 - d. Be ready for deflections to “content concerns.” Ask these folks to justify the problematic content in the current canon and explain why double standards should remain.

2. **Ask deep questions of a YA text in order to develop discussion and essay prompts.** Get Socratic on the story with open-ended queries. Roll up your sleeves and show us your Bloom’s savvy.
 - a. See how I do this with Cynthia Leitich Smith’s short story, [“Between the Lines,”](#) available in the anthology, [Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids](#).
 - b. See how I do this with *Dear Martin* in my analysis beginning page 37 of [my thesis](#).

3. **Start with short literary works.***
 - a. Find anthologies of short fiction of all genres for whole class and small group literature circles.
 - b. Kick off a unit with a YA short story. As I wrote my thesis, I learned how English teachers at Los Altos High School in California use stories like Nicola Yoon’s “Superhuman,” available in the anthology [Fresh Ink: an Anthology](#). I’m a big fan of stories such as Dhonielle Clayton’s “Weight,” available [here](#) at the *Foreshadow* anthology.
 - c. Develop Socratic discussion questions, invite students to research contemporary author bios and develop their own expanded reading lists, and write literary analysis of these shorter works.

4. **Start with speculative fiction*.**
 - a. Cynthia Leitich Smith and I discussed the opportunity we give students when we give them fantasy, sci fi, horror, and dystopian works, allowing students to discuss difficult subjects and examine human behavior.

5. **Ask why there has to be a canon (a limited list of “superior” works).**
 - a. Put students on the task of building their own individual canons, starting conversations between “classic” texts and works they value, whether graphic novellas and zines or poetry or songs or raps. Publicize the classroom canon and center assignments, both formative and summative, around student-selected works.
 - b. Create independent reading lists with your students and media specialists, and build a library and resource space so students can expand their reading adventures. Alongside your students, be reading YA from a variety of lived experiences.

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