CHAPTER 1

Texts and Adolescents

Embracing Connections and Connectedness

Alfred W. Tatum

The tenets of this chapter are:

- Examining adolescents' meaningful relationships with texts is central to selecting and discussing texts with high- and low-performing readers.
- Understanding which adolescents are finding texts meaningful and why is central to shaping curricular practices.
- Recognizing that adolescents can relate to texts yet fail to find the texts meaningful after reading them is useful for rethinking the roles of texts for adolescents.
- Having students write to increase meaningful exchanges with texts across academic disciplines is as important as meaningful reading experiences.

Engaging students with texts by honoring their multiple identities has been a focus of adolescent literacy for more than three decades. However, it is still unclear whether adolescents who read texts that connect to their multiple identities find the texts meaningful. Additionally, it is unclear whether high academically performing readers experience more meaningful relationships with texts than low academically performing readers.

An examination of this issue is warranted because students' relationships with texts are constantly changing in relationship to evolving technologies inside and outside of schools. Also, curricular shifts for U.S. secondary school students are being implemented to align instruction with sociological and scientific challenges shaped by grand societal debates fueled by the roles of schooling, economics, race, politics, ethics, and ongoing debates across ever-present media platforms. Examining adolescents'

meaningful relationships with texts is an initial step toward identifying ways for educators to select and discuss texts to nurture resilience in high and low academically performing adolescents. Students generally participate in superficial discussions of characters and content in classrooms without gaining a deeper understanding of the text's meaning as it relates to who they are and what they can become. Or students are disengaged from texts because they assess the texts as being irrelevant, teacher-driven selections mandated by school curricula that are more exclusive than inclusive to students with varying cultural and linguistic histories and experiences.

Classroom environments and curricula are not often structured to shape students' lives by engaging them with texts that they find meaningful. This absence of meaningful texts is problematic because middle and high school students are striving to find their place in the world as they bump against academic, cultural, emotional, gender, historical, linguistic, and social forces that inform their existence. I am especially concerned that students are being deprived of textual lineages—that is, both reading and writing lineages—that they will assess as being central to their immediate and long-term human development. The political philosopher Todd May (2015), who wrote *A Significant Life: Human Meaning in a Silent Universe,* writes, "the human condition demands meaning, to eliminate the demand requires the elimination of our human condition" (p. x).

Meaningfulness has been the subject of examination in religious and philosophical writings for more than six centuries in search of the "truth of our existence" (Powell, 2006).

I assert that adolescents begin to question the value and significance of their actions and the impact their actions will have on the meaningfulness of their personal, cultural, and gendered lives. Unfortunately, curricular decisions continue to be made in high schools without the benefit of data about students' relationships with texts that should govern these decisions for all students across ethnicities and achievement levels. This is problematic because curricular and pedagogical choices and planned literacy experiences could inadvertently affect adolescents' relationships with texts, thereby contributing to their disengagement with reading and writing in and out of schools.

Classroom environments and the teaching occurring within these environments may not be responding adequately to students' multiple literacy and life needs. As a result, the meaningful encounters that adolescents could experience with books, poems, and essays in schools during an optimal period of their development may be severely compromised in middle and high school classrooms. Teachers need to foster students' partnership with texts and orient meaningful exchanges with fiction and nonfiction texts (Tatum, 2014).

Classrooms are ideal settings in which to introduce and engage adolescents with texts connected to some larger ideological focus of literacy

instruction (e.g., functioning in a global society, improving the human condition). Also, classrooms are also ideal settings in which educators can use texts to broker positive relationships with adolescents and connect students to something important that will lead to different actions and thinking beyond the reading event.

This chapter is grounded in the work of other researchers who have explored how gender and social class influence students' discussion of texts (Clark, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Sprague & Keeling, 2007), the potential of text to be transformative for students (Lalik & Oliver, 2007; Moje, 2015; Mosenthal, 1998; Tatum, 2014), and meaningfulness accrued through writing (Johnson, 2018; Kirkland, 2013; Muhammad, 2012, 2014; Tatum & Gue, 2012). It also aligns with Glenn's (2012) work on touchstone texts. These are texts in adolescents' lives that are woven into their school and social behavior. These are also texts that move adolescents to feel differently about themselves, affect their views of themselves and others, and move them to some action in their current time and space because of ethnic, gender, personal, or other connections with texts (Tatum, 2008). These texts become part of one's textual lineage (Tatum, 2009).

EXAMINING TEXTUAL LINEAGES

Concerned about engaging African American adolescent males with texts, I began examining why, from a historical perspective, African American males engaged with texts. As a data collection tool, I began to construct textual lineages (see Figure 1.1). I was aiming to use the historical relationship African American males had with text to identify implications for engaging young men with text in today's classrooms. The examination yielded a rich history between African American males and texts. Historically, texts have been central in their literacy development, with the connection among reading, writing, speaking, and action eminently clear. African American males gravitated toward texts connected to larger ideals, such as cultural uplift, economic advancement, resistance to oppression, and intellectual development. Characteristically, these texts were "enabling" texts. An enabling text is one that moves beyond a sole cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus (Tatum, 2006).

Subsequent to my historical analysis of African American males' interaction with texts, I began to collect the textual lineages of middle and high school students in schools where I provide professional development for teachers. The goal was to use students' textual lineages, along with their voices, to shape how teachers and administrators select reading materials that speak to, inform, shape, and contribute to the intellectual

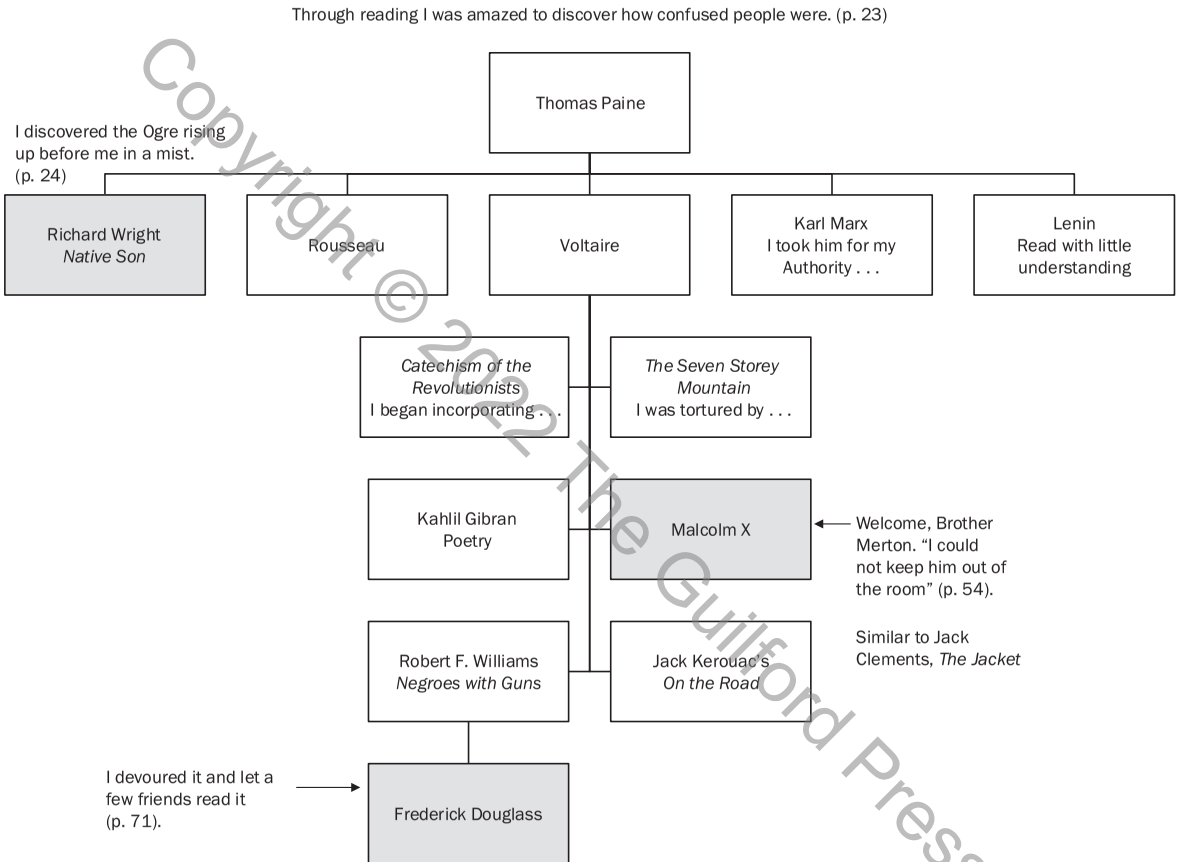

FIGURE 1.1. Eldridge Cleaver's textual lineage constructed from reading *Soul on Ice* (1968).

and emotional development of adolescents, as well as how teachers plan instruction for adolescents (see Figure 1.2).

During the academic school year of 2006–2007, I collected more than 3,126 textual lineages from middle and high school students. They were asked to identify texts (i.e., books, essays, or poems) that they thought that they would always remember and explain why the texts were meaningful to them (see Figure 1.3). In 2012, I used these students' textual lineages to identify patterns of meaningful relationships for an additional survey study of teens and texts. These patterns yielded an 18-item questionnaire completed by 1,194 adolescents across nine high schools. This chapter is based on these two data sets.

Identified Texts from Students' Textual Lineages

In the survey, 3,126 middle and high school students identified a wide range of texts that they believed they would always remember. Among the texts are classic literature (e.g., *The Scarlet Letter* [Hawthorne, 1850/2000]), young adult literature (e.g., *Bang* [Flake, 2005], *Forged by Fire* [Draper, 1998], *No Turning Back* [Naidoo, 1995], *The Contender* [Lipsyte, 1996]), nonfiction and memoirs (e.g., *A Child Called It* [Pelzer, 1993], *Angela's*

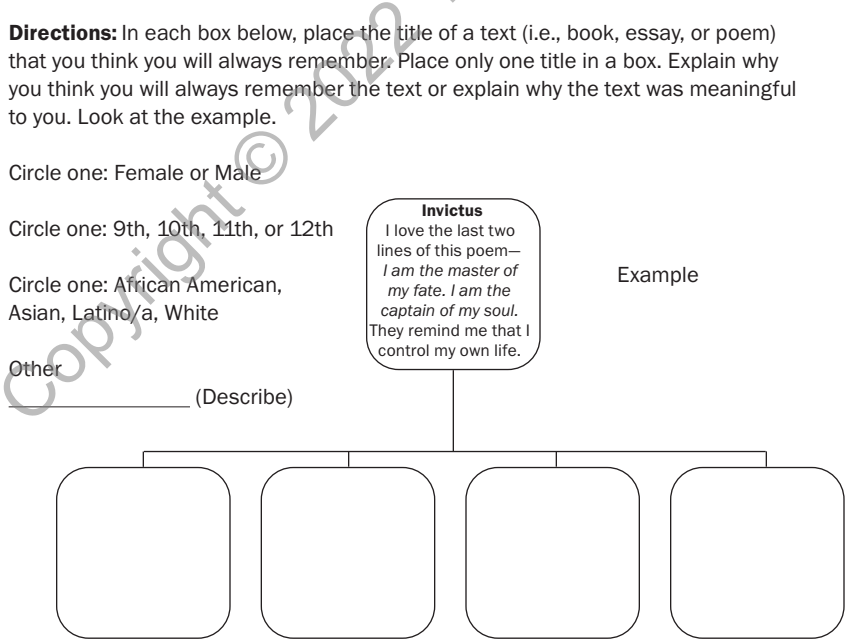

FIGURE 1.2. Textual lineage chart students completed.

1. Considering the texts that were assigned to you **in school** during the past year, how often did you find the texts to be meaningful to you? Circle **one.**
   (1) Never (2) Rarely (3) Sometimes (4) Frequently (5) Always

I read a text that . . .	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Agree (3)**	**Strongly Agree (4)**
1. Had a **lasting** effect on me	1	2	3	4
2. Made me want to do something for someone **else**	1	2	3	4
3. I **continued** to think about after I finished it	1	2	3	4
4. Started me on a new **path**	1	2	3	4
5. I **reread** several times on my own	1	2	3	4
6. **Stayed** in my mind	1	2	3	4
7. I felt a **connection** with	1	2	3	4
8. **Shaped** who I am	1	2	3	4
9. Changed the way I **behaved** toward other people	1	2	3	4
10. **Opened** my mind	1	2	3	4
11. I chose to **talk** about it with others	1	2	3	4
12. I **recommend**ed to others	1	2	3	4
13. Made me feel **connect**ed to something important	1	2	3	4
14. Made me think about **moments** in my life	1	2	3	4
15. That was **important** to me	1	2	3	4
16. **Caused** me to think the way I think today	1	2	3	4
17. **Changed** me	1	2	3	4

FIGURE 1.3. Adolescents and texts survey.

Ashes [McCourt, 1999], *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* [Angelou, 1983], *An Inconvenient Truth* [Gore, 2006], *My Bloody Life* [Sanchez, 2000], *Tuesdays with Morrie* [Albom, 1997]), and adult fiction (e.g., *My Skin Is My Skin* [Dejon, 2007], *The Body* [Kureishi, 2004]). However, if the aim is discussing texts in culturally responsive ways, then the explanations the students provide are far more important than the titles and genres, because the explanations provide implications for teaching and curricula.

The students' comments suggest that texts that move them to feel differently about themselves, affect their views of themselves, or move

them to some action in their current time and space are the ones they remember or find meaningful. The following student quotations illustrate this point:

> "*The text teaches me* that I am beautiful."
> "*The text inspires me* in so many ways, especially in embracing life."
> "*The text made me realize* that my life was not as bad as I thought."
> "*The text shows me* that I can make something out of my life."
> "[The text] was important because *it helped me change my life*."

In addition to the "enabling qualities" of the texts (Tatum, 2006), the students identified texts that led them to become reflective and introspective. They mentioned:

> "It made my life look narrow."
> "It is based on real-life experiences."
> "It resembled a part of my life."
> "Reminds me how lucky I am."
> " . . . I shouldn't let . . . my kid be abandoned on the street even if [others] tell me that it will mess up my life."

The texts the students identified and the explanations they provided mesh with other research that found that readers interrogate texts for their authenticity in terms of cultural representations of students' local contexts in school and larger cultural contexts outside of school (Clark, 2006; Galda & Beach, 2004). The students made varying connections to the texts that contributed to meaningfulness.

Ethnic and Gender Connections

Some of the students' comments make it clear that ethnic and gender connections are paramount to their remembering of texts. For example, one African American eighth-grade male, commenting on *No Turning Back* (Naidoo, 1995), stated, "Cause Black people did it," as part of his explanation for remembering the text. A White ninth-grade female student shared, "Reading about how a woman was outcast from her society because [of] a decision really made me think about my choices."

Another eighth-grade African American male makes a similar gender connection to the text *Bang* (Flake, 2005). He wrote, "It has been influential because *boys* do drugs in here, and I can see how it affects you so I will be strong and smart." He had the option of making the connection to the main character's African American identity; instead, he chose to focus on the gender identity.

Personal Connections

Several students made personal connections without mentioning ethnicity or gender. In explaining Kurieshi's (2004) novel *The Body*, a ninth-grade Asian American female offered:

> " 'The most important things are the hardest things to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them—words shrink that seem limitless when they were in your head to no more than a living size when they are brought out.' I love this quote because it is very honest. There are a million things that I want to say to people, but I am always afraid to do so."

This student used the text to think about a personal goal of wanting to use her voice to communicate with people, but she was reticent because of an internal fear. In this case, the text resonated with the student as she thought about her personal identity, not necessarily related to ethnicity or gender.

Other personal connections emerge from several other students. An eighth-grade African American male shared that "I like this book because I need this book. I feel it." This is similar to a ninth-grade White male, who offered, "I can't afford to forget one word in the book. But honestly, it's a great self-help book." Both students are suggesting that they favor texts that are personally significant to them. This position is also captured by the ninth-grade White female who found life lessons in *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Albom, 1997) and the ninth-grade Asian American student who found strength to believe in herself after reading *Naruto* (Kishimoto, 2003), a book that is part of the Manga series.

Adolescent Connections

Several adolescents identified books that had central characters in the same age range for a significant part of the text. They were able to relate to, or peep into, the experience of an age peer who affected their views or emotions in some way. For example, a ninth-grade Latino, sharing his thoughts on *A Child Called It* (Pelzer, 1993), stated, "I love books based on real life especially if it is on childhood." He suggested that books about adolescents resonated with him. An Asian American girl reflected on her life through a male character, similar in age, in the text *Among the Hidden* (Haddix, 2006). She shared, "It was one of the first books that made me realize that my life wasn't as bad as I thought it was." Luke, the main character, has to spend 12 years in hiding because his family had him illegally during a period of government-enforced legislation that prevented parents from

having more than two children. Luke eventually comes out from hiding to find that he must suppress his personal opinions because they are considered dangerous and threatening to the government. The young man in the story has to determine what he is willing to sacrifice to live. The whole notion of suppression of freedoms resonates with adolescents, and I am assuming this to be the case with this student.

The adolescent connections cross ethnic lines, as illustrated by a ninth-grade Latino who finds instruction from the 17-year-old African American main character from Harlem in the novel *The Contender* (Lipsyte, 1996). The student said, "This book shows me that I can make something out of my life from nothing." He is referring to the main character, who learns how to become a man after dropping out of high school. This character overcomes his personal fears and triumphs in the end. This student does not refer to the main character's ethnicity or gender but suggests that he can learn from someone in his peer group.

Beyond Culturally Responsive Reading and Meaningful Writing Experiences among Adolescents

Although more research is needed to ensure that the topic of culturally responsive literacy teaching is discussed responsibly and critically, the students who constructed textual lineages suggest that there are multiple dimensions of being culturally responsive. They suggest that being culturally responsive:

1. Encourages adolescents to reflect on and become introspective about their own lived experiences and histories.
2. Encourages adolescents to make connections across their multiple identities—adolescent, ethnic, gender, and personal.
3. Encourages adolescents to become enabled in some way to be, do, or think differently as a result of the texts.
4. Avoids pigeonholing adolescents by selecting texts based solely on ethnicity or gender; students find value in texts across ethnic and gender lines.
5. Recognizes the need to identify a wide range of texts that are aligned to the needs of adolescents and not limiting text selection to standards-driven or achievement-driven imperatives shaped by potentially stifling public policy and school mandates.
6. Honors the voices of adolescents, who can provide valuable insights on the types of text they find meaningful and significant.
7. Includes a wide variety of texts to expand what is generally allowed in stagnant, age-old traditions of high school English curriculum or packaged curricula in middle schools.

The suggestions emerging from the students' voices align neatly with advice from Gay (2000), who suggests that "Culturally responsive teaching has many different shapes, forms, and effects" (p. 2). She, too, recognizes the multidimensionality of culturally responsive teaching. This form of teaching encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student–teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and assessments. Gay also warns against the absence of caring in a culturally responsive approach to literacy teaching. She states, "Caring teachers are distinguished by their high performance expectations, advocacy, and empowerment of students as well as by their use of pedagogical practices that facilitate school success" (p. 62).

Still, little attention is given to nurturing adolescents' writing lineages as a pathway toward disciplinary meaningfulness. The pieces written by young males in a juvenile detention center during the fall of 2019 illustrate disciplinary meaningfulness. They were guided to write about Black theology and Black Power during our fifth day of instruction with the aim to destroy everything that goes against their humanity.

Writing across two texts and two content areas, theology and sociology, young males who were accustomed to worksheets that did not lead to meaningful exchanges wrote texts that surprised the teachers and administrators because of the young males' engagement and connections to topics and concepts that were new to them.

One student wrote in his piece, titled *Black Theologists*:

> "James cone talks about self-determination and self-identity I feel like the meaning of this quote is that for yourself to succeed and surpass negativity in life that other's may throw at you self determination is something you have to and want for yourself and the type of life you have in mind such as being successful you got to want to be successful in life and you got to go out there and get it you can't sit around and hope it comes to your front door step you have to work for it you have to feel good about yourself and have a good working ethic self determination is a very good word you can look at the word and be motivated by it you can think am I determined to do better in life and not do anything to help you but you also can think it but want to make it happen day and night you can wake up and want to be successful just by questioning yourself in that certain way. Self-identity is the way you think of yourself it also is a positive thing because going back to questioning yourself you would ask what does my identity bring towards myself and my life and just by that you would want to have a good self-identity of yourself then a negative one that's just really how I think I would want my self to have good traits about myself so I can better myself for my future and for my life and this is my way of connecting to theology. James cone is right that 'As long as man is slave to

> another power, he is not free to serve god with mature responsibility, he is not free to become what he is—human' this particular means that as long as another man has power of you, you can't continue your life the way you would want to you can't make your own decisions and go a certain route you want to your freedom is stripped from you and how you can't serve your god a certain way you want to or go to a certain place where you feel is right to do so at, and how since you are not free you can't show them your true desire for yourself or your destination you have and want to continue with in life. I agree with James cone 'we must seek to destroy everything that goes against our humanity' this means that we have to destroy all of our negative thoughts in life that goes against our self conscience but it also takes for yourself to believe that in yourself also you can't just think it you really gotta have a meaning towards it. James cone is right that 'Black power threatens the very structure of the American way of life' is basically saying that we have the strength."

Another student, in his piece titled *Black Theory*, wrote:

> "James cones is right when he said 'Black power means black people carrying out their own destiny' I say that because black people fight for things they believe is right they don't give up to they see a change we like to see things how we want it to be. I agree with James cone black Theologists 'we must seek to destroy everything that goes against our humanity' because we taking the dominant role in what we believe in like black power is all things to help find out who we really our in not what the white people want us to be but be what I should be we have our own mind so its our job to step up in show our powers in tell what we believe in think about our self in our future we will take rises for our humanity."

Both young males were lined up with hands behind their backs to be escorted by guards after these meaningful written exchanges that were positioned between their being students and inmates. I could only imagine how their lives might be different if the stride toward meaningful writing across disciplines was the norm, not the exception.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Curricula

Texts that provide knowledge about historical and modern-day contexts and writing opportunities can be powerful for adolescents. Commenting on Gore's (2006) *An Inconvenient Truth*, a ninth-grade White male wrote, "I loved this book because it was extremely straightforward about the issue of global warming and what we can do about it." Other adolescents identified

Wiesel's (2006) *Night* as a book that they found meaningful because of the new knowledge they gained about the Holocaust. This text also provides a straightforward, compelling account of a major historical event. One of the young males wrote, "we have our own mind so its our job to step up in show our powers in tell what we believe in think about our self in our future we will take rises [risks] for our humanity."

Both nonfiction and fiction texts can be used to give students knowledge about historical modern-day contexts. This is true when students read about topics such as Black theology and Black Power. This is also true of Iweala's (2007) *Beasts of No Nation*. This debut novel is a gripping account of a young boy who becomes a guerilla fighter in his nation's civil war. The content is quite disturbing: There is murder and man-on-boy rape. In his description of a disturbing rape of a young boy by the commandant, the author writes: "but me I was not struggling because I know that he will be killing me if I am struggling and since I am wanting to vomit and die" (p. 83).

This text is eerily similar to Jack London's (1903/2003) *Call of the Wild*, in which he describes the transformation of a civilized dog into a beast of the wild with no moral consideration. He writes:

> He must be master or mastered; while to show mercy was a weakness. Mercy did not exist in the primordial life. It was misunderstood for fear, and such misunderstandings made for death. Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten, was the law; and this mandate, down out of the depths of Time, he obeyed. (p. 54)

By page 47 of *Beasts of No Nation*, the young boy becomes a ruthless killer. The author writes:

> Under the bed there is a woman and her daughter just hiding. She is looking at us and worrying so much it is looking like somebody is cutting her face with a knife. She is smelling like goat and we are wanting to kill her so we are dragging her out, all of us soldier, but she is holding her daughter. They are holding each other and shaking like they are having fever. They are so thin more than us and the skin is hanging down like elephant skin so I am know she is fat before the war is coming and making rich and fat like poor and thin. The girl is so shrinking, she is almost like unborn baby—I am knowing because I have been taking them from their mother's belly to be seeing who is girl and who is boy. Are you my mother, I am saying. Are you my sister? But they are only screaming like Devil is coming for them. I am not Devil. I am not bad boy. I am not bad boy. Devil is not blessing me and I am not going to hell. But still I am thinking maybe Devil born me and that is why I am doing all of this. . . . But it is not Devil that is borning me. I am having father and mother and I am coming from them. (pp. 47–48)

This text will lead students to question why such atrocities are allowed to happen in our world. Some students may even ask whether the content

is true. These types of thought-provoking texts must be selected with care. I used the examples above to illustrate the types of controversial texts that adolescents favor but that are often not part of the curricula. The costs and benefits of text selections should be weighed carefully to avoid alienating teachers, students, or parents.

Texts can be selected that lead students to discuss the conditions that create humans' inhumanity toward humans or humans' ways of dealing with inhumane conditioning. Jane Yolen's (1988) *The Devil's Arithmetic*, Lois Lowry's (1989) *Number the Stars*, and Julius Lester's (1998) *To Be a Slave* come to mind. Lester offers testimonies of the enslaved and their "ability to retain humanity under the most inhuman conditions" (p. 111). I am struck by the words during each reading, particularly when a slave owner who professed Christianity told an enslaved man, "If I catch you here servin' God, I'll beat you. You ain't got no time to serve God, we bought you to serve us" (p. 105). Or when a son recalls, "They whipped my father 'cause he looked at a slave they killed and cried" (p. 33). He also writes, "Yet it is all the more remarkable that even two hundred years of slavery are looked upon matter-of-factly and not as a time of unrelieved horror" (p. 74). Lester's novel, as well as the others, if mediated effectively, will stand the reader in his or her tracks.

The goal is not to depress adolescents with "heavy" texts but to structure curricula by "considering what issues are worth exploring and understanding when composing essential questions" to engage adolescents (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006, p. 62). Unfortunately, we live in a country that does not have a clear definition of the role of literacy instruction for adolescents. Therefore, little discussion during curriculum conversations focuses on essential questions that young adolescents should or want to address. The discussions of 21st-century literacy skills in public policy documents and the exploration of new literacies primarily in colleges and universities have not influenced the widespread selection and discussion of texts in middle and high school classrooms. I think again about the words of Eldridge Cleaver (1968), who intimated that there are some texts that are difficult to block out; no matter what you try, they penetrate your thinking. Yet it is easy for many adolescents to block out texts in schools because most do not allow students to navigate cultural communities, or they do not reflect cultural expectations (Galda & Beach, 2004; Moje & Hinchman, 2004) connected to essential questions that are cognitively challenging for students (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006).

Responsive teaching and curricula focus on powerful and authentic texts for adolescents that help them bridge in-school and out-of-school discontinuities that exist for many students across ethnicity, gender, and language. Walter Mosley's (2005) *47* begs for consideration of a middle school audience. This text blends historical and speculative fiction. An excerpt that promotes visual imagery follows:

> It smelled bad in there and it was too hot in the summer and freezing in the winter. And every night they chained your feet to an eyebolt in the floor. The men out there were mostly angry and so they were always fighting or crying or just plain sad. But the worst thing they said about the slave quarters was that once you were there you stayed there for the rest of your life. (p. 12)

Students can use this text to wrestle with an essential question related to breaking the chains that secure one to the floor. This focus is not too different from the thoughts of the students who completed the textual lineages. They shared:

- "I love this book because this book teaches you to be strong, and always believe in yourself."—Ninth-grade Asian American female
- "Reading about how a woman was outcast from her society because of a decision really made me think about my choices."—Ninth-grade White female
- "The book shows me that I can make something of my life from nothing."—Ninth-grade Latino
- "I will always remember this book because it taught me that being in gangs can mess up your life. It was important because it helped me change my life."—Ninth-grade Latina

Figuratively speaking, all of the students expressed an interest in breaking chains by either becoming strong, making appropriate decisions, making something out of nothing, or avoiding circumstances that shape a negative life outcome trajectory. Road map texts explored in caring, supportive classroom environments that honor students' voices, aligned with pedagogical practices focused on academic excellence and identity development, serve adolescents well. Adolescents respond positively to powerful texts in tandem with powerful literacy instruction. Teachers must integrate the two in order to be responsive to the needs of students. This may require teachers to rebuild their textual lineages, both reading and writing, with adolescents in mind or to be willing to explore a wide range of texts across disciplines with their students.

FROM CONNECTIONS TO CONNECTEDNESS: FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

Although the need for culturally responsive pedagogy and curricula as discussed in this chapter holds true, my current work suggests that being culturally responsive does not necessarily lead to meaningful reading experiences during and after the reading event for low and high academically performing students. For example, students can find connections to the

texts during reading and writing, but the texts fail to connect them to something important beyond the literacy event. This finding emerged from a survey study that was conducted to learn more about adolescents' meaningful relationships with texts. This was clearly illustrated by the writings of young men I taught in a juvenile temporary detention center. I end this chapter with a description of the survey study conducted in 2012.

The 1,194 adolescent students surveyed provided responses indicating their meaningful relationships with texts. Students from six urban schools, one suburban school, and one rural school completed the survey. Of these, 76.5% were ages 14–17, 51.6% were White, 76% were first-language English speakers, 62% lived in a two-parent home, 97% were from a class size between 20 and 30 students, and 83.6% were A–C students in terms of overall school performance. Findings of the survey indicated that both high academically performing adolescents and low performing adolescents are "rarely" or "sometimes" reading texts they find meaningful. The survey data also indicated that adolescents read texts that they continue to think about or feel connections with, talk about with others, lead them to think about important moments in their lives and open their minds, and that they view as important. However, the data also indicated that adolescents disagree that they are reading texts that start them on a new path, shape who they are, change the way they behave toward other people, make them feel connected to something important, cause them to think the way they think, or change them (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1. Median Ratings with Questionnaire Items

Median rating of 2 = Disagree	Median rating of 3 = Agree
Started me on a new path (item 5)	Had a lasting effect on me (item 2)
I reread several times on my own (item 6)	Made me want to do something for someone else (item 3)
Shaped who I am (item 9)	I continued to think about after I finished it (item 4)
Changed the way I behaved toward other people (item 10)	Stayed in my mind (item 7)
Made me feel connected to something important (item 14)	I felt a connection with (item 8)
Caused me to think the way I think today (item 17)	Opened my mind (item 11)
Changed me (item 18)	I chose to talk about it with others (item 12)
	I recommended to others (item 13)
	Made me think about moments in my life (item 14)
	That was important to me (item 16)

Although it is clear that adolescents are finding connections with texts in school and outside of school, it is unclear why the texts are not connecting them to something important. Such connections would make sense in light of the attention that has been given over the years to paying attention to the identities of adolescents during literacy instruction. It is now time to strive toward helping these meaningful connections that students are having with texts become translated into actions beyond the texts—destroying things that go against our humanity. Understanding adolescents' connections with texts and working toward the texts' connecting them to something meaningful offers a new lens for teaching and mediating texts that extends the varying connections adolescents make. This adds a new dimension to culturally responsive pedagogy, and it could be useful for thinking about the roles of texts in relationship to evolving technologies, proposed curricular changes, and the shift toward informational and disciplinary texts. Each can be strengthened by embracing connections and connectedness.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I discussed the need for examining students' reading and writing lineages; for understanding texts, students, and contexts; for structuring pedagogy and curricula to discuss texts with students in culturally responsive ways; and for connecting adolescents to something meaningful beyond the reading and writing event. Students' voices and writings were used to help define cultural responsiveness and its multiple dimensions. It was also made evident that students connect to texts in a variety of ways—adolescent connections, ethnic connections, gender connections, and personal connections. Also, survey data were used to identify patterns of meaningful relationships adolescents have with texts. These student voices helped provide a dynamic blueprint for discussing texts with adolescents in culturally responsive ways.

However, there is still a divide between what we know and what happens during literacy instruction. Several factors contributing to this divide were offered: structural and curricular handicaps influenced by tradition, public policy, low levels of reading achievement, lack of research on discussing texts with adolescents in culturally responsive ways, and the absence of a clear definition of literacy instruction for adolescents. Fortunately, more attention is being given to adolescent literacy and best practices to address some of the challenges and demands for advancing the literacy development of students who are increasingly attending more diverse schools. This is being accelerated by evolving technologies that are shifting adolescents' relationships with texts and policies affecting curricular offerings.

Classroom contexts are changing. Out-of-school contexts are complicated by issues of race, social class, and language. Literacy instruction cannot afford to ignore either context. I have suggested that we can begin to discuss texts with adolescents in culturally responsive ways by honoring what we learn from their growing textual lineages and by building the textual lineages of students who are without them in relation to the in-school and out-of-school contexts that affect their lived experiences and histories. Becoming culturally responsive has to be less of a cliché and more of a clarion call. Additionally, I have suggested that we move from connections to connectedness. I offer the following to strengthen the call. We need to:

1. Define the role of literacy instruction for adolescents in a way that honors students' multiple identities and is connected to a large ideological focus.
2. Identify texts that allow students to make connections across their multiple identities.
3. Connect texts to essential questions.
4. Build the textual lineages of all students to help ensure that they can identify texts that are meaningful and significant to them.
5. Structure pedagogy and curricula that aim to strengthen students' academic, ethnic, gender, linguistic, and personal competencies.
6. Tap into students' voices to become smarter about teaching them.
7. Focus on the translation of ideas emerging from the text that aim to connect adolescents to something meaningful.

This clarion call can help us move culturally responsive literacy teaching from the sidelines, where it is marginalized, to the center of instruction. It can also help us rethink the roles of text within and beyond the reading and writing event. These shifts in focus allow us to respond to the needs of all students as they appear in our classrooms, each wrapped in different experiences and histories.

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss your own and your students' reading and writing lineages and the insights this information provides about discussing texts in culturally responsive ways. Ask your students to identify texts that have been influential to them, and why, and compare what they say with the texts you identified.
2. Administer the adolescents and texts survey to identify your students' meaningful relationships with texts.
3. What recently published texts have you encountered that might resonate in culturally responsive ways with the adolescents you teach? Do keep in mind that there may be considerable differences between the texts that younger

and older adolescents, and varying communities, find engaging. How do the texts compare with the texts adolescents are assigned in schools?

4. How might classroom pedagogy and curriculum selections align with and help to develop students' lived experiences and histories in culturally responsive ways that they recognize and value?

REFERENCES

Albom, M. (1997). *Tuesdays with Morrie: An old man, a young man, and life's greatest lesson*. Doubleday.

Angelou, M. (1983). *I know why the caged bird sings*. New York: Bantam.

Clark, L. W. (2006). Power through voicing others: Girls' positioning of boys in literature circle discussion. *Journal of Literacy Research, 38*, 53–79.

Cleaver, E. (1968). *Soul on ice*. Delta.

Dejon. (2007). *My skin is my skin*. Urban Books.

Draper, S. (1998). *Forged by fire*. Aladdin.

Flake, S. (2005) *Bang*. Hyperion.

Galda, L., & Beach, R. (2004). Response to literature as a cultural activity. In R. Ruddell & N. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5th ed., pp. 852–869). International Reading Association.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.

Glenn, L. N. (2012). Playing for real: Texts and the performance of identity. In D. Alvermann & K. Hinchman (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives* (3rd ed., pp. 3–28). Routledge.

Gore, A. (2006). *An inconvenient truth: The planetary emergence of global warming and what we can do about it*. Rodale.

Haddix, M. P. (2006). *Among the hidden*. Aladdin.

Hawthorne, N. (2000). *The scarlet letter*. Modern Library Edition. (Original work published 1850)

Iweala, U. (2007). *Beasts of no nation*. HarperCollins.

Johnson, L. (2018). Alternative writing worlds: The possibilities of personal writing for adolescent writers. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 62*(3), 311–318.

Kirkland, D. (2013). *A search past silence: The literacy of young Black men*. Teachers College Press.

Kishimoto, M. (2003). *Naruto*. Viz Media.

Kureishi, H. (2004). *The body*. Scribner.

Lalik, R., & Oliver, K. L. (2007). Differences and tensions in implementing a pedagogy of critical literacy with adolescent girls. *Reading Research Quarterly, 42*(1), 46–70.

Lester, J. (1998). *To be a slave*. Puffin.

Lipsyte, R. (1996). *The contender*. HarperCollins.

London, J. (2003). *Call of the wild*. Scholastic. (Original work published 1903)

Lowry, L. (1989). *Number the stars*. Bantam.

May, T. (2015). *A significant life: Human meaning in a silent universe*. University of Chicago Press.

McCourt, F. (1999). *Angela's ashes*. Simon & Schuster.
Moje, E. (2015). Doing and teaching disciplinary literacy with adolescent learners: A social and cultural enterprise. *Harvard Educational Review, 85*(2), 254–278.
Moje, E., & Hinchman, K. (2004). Culturally responsive practices for youth literacy learning. In T. Jetton & J. Dole (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy research and practice* (pp. 321–350). Guilford Press.
Mosenthal, P. (1998). Reframing the problem of adolescence and adolescent literacy: A dilemma-management perspective. In D. E. Alvermann, K. A. Hinchman, D. W. Moore, S. F. Phelps, & D. R. Waff (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives* (pp. 325–352). Erlbaum.
Mosley, W. (2005). *47*. Little, Brown.
Muhammad, G. (2012). Creating spaces for Black adolescent girls to "Write it out!" *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 56*(3), 203–211.
Muhammad, G. (2014). Focus on middle school: Black girls write! Literary benefits of a summer writing collaborative grounded in history. *Childhood Education, 90*(4), 323–326.
Naidoo, B. (1995). *No turning back: A novel of South Africa*. HarperTrophy.
Pelzer, D. (1993). *A child called "it": One child's courage to survive*. Omaha Press.
Powell, R. (2006). *Life: The exquisite art of meaningfulness*. AuthorHouse.
Sanchez, R. (2000). *My bloody life: The making of a Latin King*. Chicago Review Press.
Smith, M., & Wilhelm, J. (2006). *Going with the flow: How to engage boys (and girls) in their literacy learning*. Heinemann.
Sprague, M., & Keeling, K. (2007). *Discovering their voices: Engaging adolescent girls with young adult literature*. International Reading Association.
Tatum, A. W. (2006). Engaging African American males in reading. *Educational Leadership, 63*(5), 44–49.
Tatum, A. W. (2008). Discussing texts with adolescents in culturally responsive ways. In K. Hinchman & H. Sheridan-Thomas (Eds.), *Best practices in adolescent literacy instruction* (pp. 3-19). Guilford Press.
Tatum, A.W. (2009). *Reading for their life: (Re)building the textual lineages of African American adolescent males*. Heinemann.
Tatum, A. W. (2014). Orienting African American male adolescents toward meaningful literacy exchanges with print. *Journal of Education, 194*(1), 35–48.
Tatum, A.W., & Gue, V. (2012). The sociocultural benefits of writing for African American adolescent males. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 28*(2), 123–142.
Wiesel, E. (2006). *Night*. Hill & Wang.
Yolen, J. (1990). *The devil's arithmetic*. Puffin.

Guilford Publications
370 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
212-431-9800
800-365-7006
www.guilford.com