

What Gets Black Women Heard?



Accessed from the University of Illinois, Chicago's African American Studies website,
<https://aast.uic.edu/academics/courses-2/aast-261/>

Supporting Questions

1. How can Black women writers use *authenticity* and *blackness* to connect with audiences?
2. How can Black women writers use social issues to frame a narrative?
3. How can Black women writers use *intellectualism* to propel their writing?
4. Have these writers' literary devices stood the test of time?

High School African American Studies Inquiry

What Gets Black Women Heard?	
C3 Framework Indicators	<p>D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.</p> <p>D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.</p>
Cognitive Skills	Argumentative Claim, Point of View/Purpose, Integration of Evidence, Informational/ Explanatory Thesis
Staging the Compelling Question	Read Maya Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise” and/or “Equality.” Discuss the ways in which Angelou incorporates gender and race within the poem(s).

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	Supporting Question 4
How can Black women writers use <i>authenticity</i> and <i>blackness</i> to connect with audiences?	How can Black women writers use social issues to frame a narrative?	How can Black women writers use <i>intellectualism</i> to propel their writing?	How have the writers’ literary devices stood the test of time?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Create a mind map diagram demonstrating how Zora Neal Hurston used <i>authenticity</i> and <i>blackness</i> in her writing.	Write a biographical sketch of Toni Morrison, connecting social issues she experienced to her writings.	Write an explanatory essay that explains how Maya Angelou uses (and redefines) <i>intellectualism</i> .	Create a series of evidence-based claims about how the literary devices are employed.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<p>Source A: Excerpt, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i></p> <p>Source B: Article, “5 Ways Zora Neale Hurston’s Work Influenced Black Literature and Black Womanhood”</p> <p>Source C: Article, “A Society of One”</p>	<p>Source A: Excerpt, <i>Beloved</i></p> <p>Source B: Excerpt, <i>Jazz</i></p> <p>Source C: Article, “Toni Morrison, Towering Novelist...”</p> <p>Source D: Article, “Toni Morrison’s ‘The Origin of Others’ Encourages Minorities to Control Their Narrative”</p>	<p>Source A: Excerpt, <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i></p> <p>Source B: <i>BBC News</i>, Interview with Maya Angelou</p> <p>Source C: Book excerpt, explanation of Angelou as a <i>public intellectual</i>.</p>	<p>Source A: Excerpt, <i>Between the World and Me</i></p> <p>Source B: Excerpt, <i>Dear Martin</i></p> <p>Source C: Excerpt, <i>The Poet X</i></p> <p>Source D: Excerpt, <i>Salvage the Bones</i></p>

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT: <i>What gets Black women heard?</i> Construct an argument that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.
	EXTENSION Have a class discussion about the enduring challenges facing Black women writers and Black women public figures.
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND Review the school/community demographics and different subjects’ reading lists.</p> <p>ASSESS Assess the extent to which marginalized communities are represented or absent within the reading lists.</p> <p>ACT Create a proposal of changes to the reading list to make it representative of the community.</p>

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of Black women writers and the literary devices they employ to communicate with audiences and “be heard.” The compelling question—*What gets Black women heard?*—asks students to evaluate the writing of three prominent Black women writers and contemporary Black writers in order to deconstruct the relevance and meaning behind their work. Among many Black women authors of note, this inquiry examines the works of Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. As pillars of African-American writing, their publications illuminate the essence of racism, colorism, intellectualism, and authenticity for their audiences and future generations of Black writers.

Throughout the inquiry project, students are asked to review and discuss the literary elements through which the authors make themselves “heard,” whether the social issues that connect the writers and their audience(s), societal challenges uniquely facing Black women authors, and how these works shaped future generations of Black writers. For each supporting question, one of the three Black women writers is featured. As standard-bearers, Hurston, Morrison, and Angelou demonstrate the particular ways that they employed the literary elements as Black women. Though each question focuses on one writer, teachers may supplement the readings with other authors who employed the same elements in their writing.

A key theme of this literary inquiry is *intersectionality*. As discrimination based upon race and gender, at times, go hand-in-hand, students examine gender roles, as well as race and ethnic identity in the works of prominent Black women authors. These readings are complemented by contemporary commentary on their contributions and through evaluating their influence in contemporary works.

Note: This inquiry is expected to take ten to fourteen 45-minute class periods. Teachers should adjust the inquiry time frame if their students need different instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Likewise, this inquiry may be expanded to a multi-week unit, if reading any of the featured sources in full. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of literary analysis skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question—*What gets black women heard?*—students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

Context of the Inquiry

This inquiry was developed through a collaboration between C3Teachers and a team of Summit Learning curriculum fellows. This collection of inquiry projects were designed to meet the needs of states and districts, who are increasingly calling for ethnic and gender studies’ inclusion in curriculum. Schools need culturally relevant materials that represent the histories and experiences of the communities they serve. The focus on culturally

relevant curriculum is an inclusive focus. Culture is not a thing that some people have and others do not. This project, and others in the collection, represent a diverse set of identities and perspectives.

Additional Resources

To further illuminate the enduring nature of the compelling question for this inquiry, teachers may incorporate sources related to the #SayHerName campaign, intersectionality, black feminism, or similar topics.

Coaston, J. (28 May 2019). The Intersectionality Wars. *Vox Media*. News Article. Accessed from:

<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>

Cooper, B. (4 June 2020). Why Are Black Women and Girls Still an Afterthought in Our Outrage Over Police Violence? *Time Magazine*. News Article. Accessed from:

<https://time.com/5847970/police-brutality-black-women-girls/>

Lewis, J.J. (8 October 2018). African American Women Writers. *ThoughtCo*. Web Article. Accessed from:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/african-american-women-writers-3528288>

Peterson, M. (4 March 2019). The Revolutionary Practice of Black Feminism. *National Museum of African American History & Culture*. Web Article. Accessed from:

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/collection/revolutionary-practice-black-feminisms>

Maya Angelou

Als, H. (29 July 2002). Songbird: Maya Angelou Takes Another Look at Herself. *The New Yorker*. Review. Accessed from: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/08/05/songbird>.

Braxton, J.M. (1999). *Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings : A Casebook*. Digital Book. New York: Oxford University Press. Accessed from:

<https://archive.org/details/mayaangelousikno00joan/page/n9/mode/2up>.

Maya Angelou Biography (2020). Maya Angelou Official Website. Accessed from: <https://www.mayaangelou.com/>.

Toni Morrison

Als, H. (20 October 2003). Ghosts in the House: How Toni Morrison Fostered a Generation of Black Writers. *The New Yorker*. Featured Article. Accessed from:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/10/27/ghosts-in-the-house>.

Dwyer, L. (6 August 2019). How Toni Morrison Made Us See Black Women. *Shondaland*. Featured Article. Accessed from: <https://www.shondaland.com/inspire/books/a18203931/toni-morrison-death/>.

Ejaita, D. (9 August 2019). Opinions: *Beloved*: Eight Black Female Writers and Thinkers on Toni Morrison's Life and Legacy. *The Washington Post*. Opinion Article. Accessed from:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/08/09/eight-black-women-including-michelle-obama-toni-morrisons-life-legacy/?arc404=true>.

Fang, M. (6 August 2019). Former President Barack Obama Remembers Toni Morrison. *Huffington Post*. Featured Article. Accessed from:
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/barack-obama-toni-morrison_n_5d4992c3e4b01ae816c8fac8

Zora Neale Hurston

Burke, M.C. (2012). Zora Neale Hurston's Sweat and the Black Female Voice: The Perspective of the African-American Woman. *Inquiries Journal* 4(5), p. 1. Journal Article. Accessed from:
<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/646/zora-neale-hurstons-sweat-and-the-black-female-voice-the-perspective-of-the-african-american-woman>

Boyd, V. (2020). She Was the Party. *Zora Neale Hurston: The Official Website of Zora Neale Hurston*. Web Article. Accessed from:
<https://www.zoranealehurston.com/resource/she-was-the-party-their-eyes-were-watching-god/>

Hathaway, R.V. (2004). The Unbearable Weight of Authenticity: Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and a Theory of "Touristic Reading." *Journal of American Folklore*, 117(464), p. 168-190. Accessed from:
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/55148/pdf>.

O'Dell, C. (25 January 1943). "Mary Margaret McBride" with Guest Zora Neale Hurston. Interview. Accessed from:
<https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/MCBRIDE2.pdf>.

Cognitive Skills

The Summit Learning Cognitive Skills Rubric is an assessment and instruction tool that outlines the continuum of skills that are necessary for college and career readiness. Cognitive Skills are interdisciplinary skills that require higher-order thinking and application.

The rubric includes 36 skills and 8 score levels applicable to students in grades 3 through 12. Through Summit Learning, students practice and develop Cognitive Skills in every subject and in every grade level. The use of a common analytic rubric for assessment of project-based learning allows for targeted, standards-aligned feedback to students and supports the development of key skills over time. For more information, see the Cognitive Skills rubric here: <https://cdn.summitlearning.org/assets/marketing/Cognitive-Skills-Document-Suite.pdf>

The inquiry highlights the following Cognitive Skills.

Summit Learning Cognitive Skills	
Argumentative Claim	Developing a strong opinion/ argument through clear, well-sequenced claims.
Informational/Explanatory Thesis	Constructing explanations or conveying ideas and information through clear, well-organized, relevant ideas.
Point of View/Purpose	Analyzing the point of view or purpose of a character, narrator, and/or author/speaker and how that point of view influences the message or meaning of the text.
Integration of Evidence	Representing evidence accurately (via notes, summary, and/or paraphrase) and including evidence in text.

Staging the Compelling Question	
Compelling Question	What gets Black women heard?
Featured Sources	Source A: Maya Angelou, (1978). "Still I Rise." Poem. Accessed from: https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/maya_angelou_2012_6.pdf#page=57
	Source B: Maya Angelou, (1990). "Equality." Poem. Accessed from: Accessed from: https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/maya_angelou_2012_6.pdf#page=18

Staging Task

The compelling question-*What gets Black women heard?*-asks students to explore the social, historical, and cultural contexts surrounding Black women writers and their works. To help prepare students for the inquiry, teachers can introduce students to *intersectionality*, specifically considering the social, economic, and political barriers facing women of color. See Additional Resources for an article on intersectionality.

For this task, students read one (or both) of Maya Angelou's poems, "Still I Rise" and/or "Equality." Students note the ways in which race and gender appear in the poem(s) by considering the implicit and explicit way Angelou discusses the barriers associated with race/gender.

Featured Sources

The following sources were selected to help introduce students to themes of intersectionality within Black women writers' work. These sources help stage the inquiry, preparing students to engage in the inquiry process. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond to student needs.

SOURCE A In this poem, "Still I Rise," Maya Angelou communicates resilience and confidence in the face of discrimination.

SOURCE B The poem, "Equality," critiques social inequality and its relationship to freedom.

Staging the Compelling Question

Featured Source A

Source A: Maya Angelou, (1978). "Still I Rise." Poem. Accessed from:
https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/maya_angelou_2012_6.pdf#page=57

Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
 With your bitter, twisted lies,
 You may tread me in the very dirt
 But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
 Why are you beset with gloom?
 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
 Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
 With the certainty of tides,
 Just like hopes springing high,
 Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
 Bowed head and lowered eyes?
 Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
 Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
 Don't you take it awful hard
 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
 Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
 You may cut me with your eyes,
 You may kill me with your hatefulness,
 But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
 Does it come as a surprise
 That I dance like I've got diamonds
 At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
 I rise
 Up from a past that's rooted in pain
 I rise
 I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
 Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
 Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
 I rise
 Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
 I rise
 Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
 I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
 I rise
 I rise
 I rise.

Staging the Compelling Question

Featured Source B

Source B: Maya Angelou, (1990). "Equality." Poem. Accessed from:
 Accessed from:
https://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/maya_angelou_2012_6.pdf#page=18

Equality

You declare you see me dimly
 through a glass which will not shine,
 though I stand before you boldly,
 trim in rank and marking time.
 You do own to hear me faintly
 as a whisper out of range,
 while my drums beat out the message
 and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
 Equality, and I will be free.

You announce my ways are wanton,
 that I fly from man to man,
 but if I'm just a shadow to you,
 could you ever understand ?

We have lived a painful history,
 we know the shameful past,
 but I keep on marching forward,
 and you keep on coming last.

Equality, and I will be free.
 Equality, and I will be free.

Take the blinders from your vision,
 take the padding from your ears,
 and confess you've heard me crying,
 and admit you've seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,
 hear the blood throb in my veins.
 Yes, my drums are beating nightly,
 and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
 Equality, and I will be free.

Supporting Question 1

Supporting Question	How can Black women writers use <i>authenticity</i> and <i>blackness</i> to connect with audiences?
Formative Performance Task	Create a mind map diagram demonstrating how Zora Neal Hurston used <i>authenticity</i> and <i>blackness</i> in her writing.
Cognitive Skills	Informational/Explanatory Thesis: Students develop this skill by constructing explanations or conveying ideas and information through clear, well-organized, relevant ideas.
Featured Sources	Source A: Zora Neale Hurston, (1937). <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> . Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: https://www.zoranealehurston.com/resource/excerpt-from-their-eyes-were-watching-god/ .
	Source B: Jabali, M. (14 May 2018). 5 Ways Zora Neale Hurston's Work Influenced Black Literature And Black Womanhood. <i>Essence</i> . Magazine Article. Accessed from: https://www.essence.com/culture/zora-neale-hurston-influence/ .
	Source C: Pierpont, C.R. (17 February 1997). A Society of One: Zora Neale Hurston, American Contrarian. <i>The New Yorker</i> . Featured Article. Accessed from: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/02/17/a-society-of-one .

Supporting Question 1 and Formative Performance Task

In the first supporting question—*How can Black women writers use authenticity and blackness to connect with audiences?*—students are introduced to the writing and impact of Zora Neale Hurston. Students consider the elements that Hurston emphasized in her writing, as well as the conflict that arose from critics. The emphasized literary theme in this supporting question is *authenticity*, complemented by *blackness*. Literary critics have noted Hurston employs *blackness* as a frame for her writings. *Authenticity* through *blackness* creates a deeper impact and engagement with the intended audience, particularly through her use of dialect.

The formative performance task calls on students to describe how Hurston used *authenticity* and *blackness* in her writing to connect with audiences, citing examples from excerpts. To demonstrate her use of these two themes, students can put examples on a mind map diagram or Future’s Wheel.

Students should first read the excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, documenting examples from the text, noting how the two themes overlap/complement each other. Using the mind map format, students can connect examples to one another and the literary commentary.

Note on Language

The terms *authenticity* and *blackness* can be defined as follows:

- *Authenticity*: being authentic or genuine in portraying Black identity
- *Blackness*: referring to one's Black identity

Authenticity and *blackness*, as used here, refer to the ways in which Black discourse reproduces (and/or produces) Black identity. Through her use of authentic dialect, Hurston positions her writing within a clear Black identity, connected to her experiences as a Black woman. In short, these terms can be defined:

As an artist emerging from the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston's use of dialect was both applauded and criticized. While providing a voice that authentically reflected Black dialogic patterns, critics charged that Hurston presented characters in an oversimplified (or ignorant) manner.

Featured Sources

The following sources were selected to introduce students to Hurston's writing, as well as contextualize her experiences and perspectives in the Jim Crow South. The literature highlights Hurston's influence, as well as the challenges posed by her structure of writing. Additional sources are listed in the "Overview" section above. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond to student needs.

SOURCE A The first source is an excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Depending on the scope of this inquiry, teachers may choose to add additional excerpts. This excerpt is the opening passage from the novel. It establishes gender as a framing device. It also includes passages that employ Black dialect.

SOURCE B The second source is an article that describes the ways in which Hurston influenced Black literature. This article provides context for her writing, particularly how it was received by Black and White audiences.

SOURCE C The last source provides more biographical information about Hurston, including her use of Black dialect.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source A

Source A: Zora Neale Hurston, (1937). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Book Excerpt (Novel).
 Accessed from:
<https://www.zoranealehurston.com/resource/excerpt-from-their-eyes-were-watching-god/>.

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.

So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment.

The people all saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths. They sat in judgment.

Seeing the woman as she was made them remember the envy they had stored up from other times. So they chewed up the back parts of their minds and swallowed with relish. They made burning statements with questions, and killing tools out of laughs. It was mass cruelty. A mood come alive, Words walking without masters; walking altogether like harmony in a song.

"What she doin coming back here in dem overalls? Can't she find no dress to put on? – Where's dat blue satin dress she left here in? – Where all dat money her husband took and died and left her? – What dat ole forty year ole 'oman doin' wid her hair swingin' down her back lak some young gal? Where she left dat young lad of a boy she went off here wid? – Thought she was going to marry? – Where he left her? – What he done wid all her money? – Betcha he off wid some gal so young she ain't even got no hairs – why she don't stay in her class?"

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source B

Source B: Jabali, M. (14 May 2018). 5 Ways Zora Neale Hurston's Work Influenced Black Literature And Black Womanhood. *Essence*. Magazine Article. Accessed from: <https://www.essence.com/culture/zora-neale-hurston-influence/>.

Ridiculed in her life yet revered after death, [Zora Neale Hurston](#) has left an indelible legacy on the literary community and commanded an influential place in Black history.

Forgoing conventions of what it meant to be a woman and a black writer, Hurston was free-spirited, both professionally and personally. These qualities—which materialized in ambivalent politics and a commitment to using southern black vernacular when Black intellectuals sought to divorce themselves from vestiges of the Jim Crow South—lent her a unique artistic voice. But they also left her vulnerable to criticism that she pandered to white audiences.

In the past few decades, however, thanks to the tenacious support of feminist writers like [Alice Walker](#), Hurston's work re-entered the black canon and made her primary work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, required reading in classrooms across the country. Now, [with the release of *Barracoon*](#), Hurston's work is again in the spotlight.

*Article Excerpt. See the article for full text.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source C

Source C: Pierpont, C.R. (17 February 1997). A Society of One: Zora Neale Hurston, American Contrarian. *The New Yorker*. Featured Article. Accessed from:
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/02/17/a-society-of-one>.

In the spring of 1938, Zora Neale Hurston informed readers of the *Saturday Review of Literature* that Mr. Richard Wright's first published book, "Uncle Tom's Children," was made up of four novellas set in a Dismal Swamp of race hatred, in which not a single act of understanding or sympathy occurred, and in which the white man was generally shot dead. "There is lavish killing here," she wrote, "perhaps enough to satisfy all male black readers." Hurston, who had swept onto the Harlem scene a decade before, was one of the very few black women in a position to write for the pallidly conventional *Saturday Review*. Wright, the troubling newcomer, had already challenged her authority to speak for their race. Reviewing Hurston's novel "Their Eyes Were Watching God" in the *New Masses* the previous fall, he had dismissed her prose for its "facile sensuality"—a problem in Negro writing that he traced to the first black American female to earn literary fame, the slave Phillis Wheatley. Worse, he accused Hurston of cynically perpetuating a minstrel tradition meant to make white audiences laugh. It says something about the social complexity of the next few years that it was Wright who became a Book-of-the-Month Club favorite, while Hurston's work went out of print and she nearly starved. For the first time in America, a substantial white audience preferred to be shot at.

*Article Excerpt. See the article for full text.

Supporting Question 2

Supporting Question	How can Black women writers use social issues to frame a narrative?
Formative Performance Task	Write a biographical sketch of Toni Morrison, connecting social issues she experienced to her writings.
Cognitive Skills	<p>Argumentative Claim: Students develop this skill by using evidence to construct a claim that addresses the supporting question.</p> <p>Integration of Evidence: Students develop this skill by using representing evidence accurately within their writing.</p>
Featured Sources	<p>Source A: Toni Morrison, (1987). <i>Beloved</i>. Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/117647/beloved-by-toni-morrison/9780525659273/excerpt</p>
	<p>Source B: Toni Morrison, (1992). <i>Jazz</i>. Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/117649/jazz-by-toni-morrison/9781400076215/excerpt.</p>
	<p>Source C: Fox, M. (6 August 2019). Toni Morrison, Towering Novelist of the Black Experience, Dies at 88. <i>The New York Times</i>. News Article. Accessed from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/books/toni-morrison-dead.html</p>
	<p>Source D: Robertson, D. (20 November 2017). V Books: Toni Morrison’s ‘The Origin Of Others’ Encourages Minorities To Control Their Narrative. <i>Vibe Magazine</i>. Book Review. Accessed from: https://www.vibe.com/2017/11/v-books-toni-morrisons-the-origin-of-others</p>

Supporting Question 2 and Formative Performance Task

In the second supporting question—*How can Black women writers use social issues to frame a narrative?*—students engage with the writings of Toni Morrison. Morrison is a pillar of the Black writing community, addressing race relations and associated challenges that erupted in the twentieth century. Her writing embodies the evolution of racism as a force of marginalization and oppression. This question frames students’ evaluation of Morrison’s connection with the Black community, examining how social issues encourage a dialogue between the writer and her audience.

The formative performance task asks students to create a biographical sketch of Morrison, connecting social issues to the themes presented in her writing. Students can demonstrate the biographical sketch in various mediums, such as a storyboard, composed of images and text.

Featured Sources

The following sources were selected to introduce students to Morrison’s writing, as well as to contextualize her experiences and perspectives about marginalization and oppression. Additional sources are listed in the “Overview” section above. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond

to student needs.

SOURCE A The first source is an excerpt from *Beloved*. Depending on the scope of this inquiry, teachers may choose to add additional excerpts. This excerpt is the opening passage from the novel.

SOURCE B The first source is an excerpt from *Jazz*. Depending on the scope of this inquiry, teachers may choose to add additional excerpts. This excerpt is the opening passage from the novel.

SOURCE C The third source, a featured article published after Morrison’s death, provides more biographical information about Morrison, particularly emphasizing how the legacy of slavery manifests in her writing

SOURCE D The last source reviews Morrison’s “The Origin of Others,” and Morrison’s use of literature and identity.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source A

Source A: Toni Morrison, (1987). *Beloved*. Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from:
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/117647/beloved-by-toni-morrison/9780525659273/excerpt>

124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old--as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny band prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more; another kettleful of chickpeas smoking in a heap on the floor; soda crackers crumbled and strewn in a line next to the doorsill. Nor did they wait for one of the relief periods: the weeks, months even, when nothing was disturbed. No. Each one fled at once--the moment the house committed what was for him the one insult not to be borne or witnessed a second time. Within two months, in the dead of winter, leaving their grandmother, Baby Suggs; Sethe, their mother; and their little sister, Denver, all by themselves in the gray and white house on Bluestone Road. It didn't have a number then, because Cincinnati didn't stretch that far. In fact, Ohio had been calling itself a state only seventy years when first one brother and then the next stuffed quilt packing into his hat, snatched up his shoes, and crept away from the lively spite the house felt for them.

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source B

Source B: Toni Morrison, (1992). *Jazz*. Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from:
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/117649/jazz-by-toni-morrison/9781400076215/excerpt>.

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all that snow, and when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, "I love you."

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source C

Source C: Fox, M. (6 August 2019). Toni Morrison, Towering Novelist of the Black Experience, Dies at 88. *The New York Times*. News Article. Accessed from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/books/toni-morrison-dead.html>

Her narratives mingle the voices of men, women, children and even ghosts in layered polyphony. Myth, magic and superstition are inextricably intertwined with everyday verities, a technique that caused Ms. Morrison’s novels to be likened often to those of Latin American magic realist writers like [Gabriel García Márquez](#).

In “Sula,” a woman blithely lets a train run over her leg for the insurance money it will give her family. In “Song of Solomon,” a baby girl is named Pilate by her father, who “had thumbed through the Bible, and since he could not read a word, chose a group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome.” In “Beloved,” the specter of a murdered child takes up residence in the house of her murderer.

Throughout Ms. Morrison’s work, elements like these coalesce around her abiding concern with slavery and its legacy. In her fiction, the past is often manifest in a harrowing present — a world of alcoholism, rape, incest and murder, recounted in unflinching detail.

It is a world, Ms. Morrison writes in “[Beloved](#)” (the novel is set in the 19th century but stands as a metaphor for the 20th), in which “anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind.”

“Not just work, kill or maim you, but dirty you,” she goes on. “Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up.”

But as Ms. Morrison’s writing also makes clear, the past is just as strongly manifest in the bonds of family, community and race — bonds that let culture, identity and a sense of belonging be transmitted from parents to children to grandchildren. These generational links, her work unfailingly suggests, form the only salutary chains in human experience.

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source D

Source D: Robertson, D. (20 November 2017). V Books: Toni Morrison's 'The Origin Of Others' Encourages Minorities To Control Their Narrative. *Vibe Magazine*. Book Review. Accessed from: <https://www.vibe.com/2017/11/v-books-toni-morrison-the-origin-of-others>

The autobiographical moments in *The Origin of Others* are the most interesting paragraphs within this book. Peeking into the life of this Pulitzer Prize-winning author's personal life to understand her concerns for black America, provides a logical solution in shaping black identity -- control our narrative. But honestly, how many white supremacists or KKK members are actually paying attention to our stories, with the hopes of bridging the gap between black and white relations? And I'm guilty, too. I don't buy white supremacist literature, although it would help my understanding of their thought process.

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 3

Supporting Question	How can Black women writers use <i>intellectualism</i> to propel their writing?
Formative Performance Task	Write an explanatory essay that explains how Maya Angelou uses (and redefines) <i>intellectualism</i> .
Cognitive Skills	Point of View/Purpose: Students apply this skill by analyzing how the author’s point of view influences the meaning of the text. Evidence of this skill can be found in the response to the supporting question.
Featured Sources	Source A: Maya Angelou, (1969). <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> (Excerpt). Novel. Accessed from: https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/3924/i-know-why-the-caged-bird-sings-by-maya-angelou/9780812980028/excerpt .
	Source B: BBC News (28 May 2014). Maya Angelou interview on HARDtalk. Accessed from: Video Interview Link
	Source C: Stanley, C.A. (2018). “Researcher as Instrument and Advocate...” Book Chapter Excerpt. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines and explains Angelou as a <i>public intellectual</i>.

Supporting Question 3 and Formative Performance Task

The third supporting question—*How can Black women writers use intellectualism to propel their writing?*—asks students to consider their understanding of “intellectualism” and reassess its meaning through the work of Maya Angelou. As a “public intellectual,” Angelou’s writing and public appearances demonstrate the ways in which language and experiences coalesce in ways that expand “intellectualism” beyond formal educational structures. From a stint of self-induced silence in response to abuse to being one of the most revered orators in modern history, Angelou used her Blackness to challenge and redefine Black women as intellectuals.

For the formative performance task, students write an explanatory essay that explains how Maya Angelou uses (and redefines) *intellectualism*.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedures:

- Individually or in small groups, create a definition of “intellectualism” and associated concepts; then, explain what makes a “public intellectual” different. (Featured Source C provides a definition, if needed). Students should consider how one can “intellectualize” their personal experiences.
- Using the featured sources, pull examples of how Angelou intellectualizes the Black experience through her writing and oratory. Using the examples, students should explain how intellectualization impacts the meaning of her writing.
 - How is her point of view and purpose communicated and developed?
 - How does *intellectualizing* one’s experiences change the meaning?

Note on Language

The term *intellectualism* can broadly be defined as: exercising (using and developing) one's intellect.

Though this is a broad, inclusive definition, students may associate intellectualism more narrowly and, likewise, with formal education. No matter the understanding students initially hold, the ways in which Angelou embodies the *public intellectual* should broaden their interpretation of the term.

Featured Sources

The following sources were selected to introduce students to Angelou's writing and oratory, as well as explain the ways in which she embodies the *public intellectual*. Additional sources are listed in the "Overview" section above. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond to student needs.

SOURCE A The first source is an excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Depending on the scope of this inquiry, teachers may choose to add additional excerpts. This excerpt is the opening passage from the novel.

SOURCE B In this video from the BBC, Angelou discusses some of her personal history, work, and recent experiences. Teachers may want to analyze Angelou's discussion of her emotions and thoughts through a similar lens as a literary analysis. Students can consider how her experiences inform her writing. On this page, teachers can find several other videos of Angelou.

SOURCE C This brief excerpt defines the notion of a *public intellectual* and explains the very particular ways that Angelou embodies this idea.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source A

Source A: Maya Angelou, (1969). *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Book Excerpt (Novel).

Accessed from:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/3924/i-know-why-the-caged-bird-sings-by-maya-angelou/9780812980028/excerpt>.

Prologue

"What you looking at me for?
I didn't come to stay . . ."

I hadn't so much forgot as I couldn't bring myself to remember. Other things were more important.

"What you looking at me for?
I didn't come to stay . . ."

Whether I could remember the rest of the poem or not was immaterial. The truth of the statement was like a wadded-up handkerchief, sopping wet in my fists, and the sooner they accepted it the quicker I could let my hands open and the air would cool my palms.

"What you looking at me for . . . ?"

The children's section of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was wiggling and giggling over my well-known forgetfulness.

The dress I wore was lavender taffeta, and each time I breathed it rustled, and now that I was sucking in air to breathe out shame it sounded like crepe paper on the back of hearses.

As I'd watched Momma put ruffles on the hem and cute little tucks around the waist, I knew that once I put it on I'd look like a movie star. (It was silk and that made up for the awful color.) I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world. Hanging softly over the black Singer sewing machine, it looked like magic, and when people saw me wearing it they were going to run up to me and say, "Marguerite [sometimes it was 'dear Marguerite'], forgive us, please, we didn't know who you were," and I would answer generously, "No, you couldn't have known. Of course I forgive you."

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source B

Source B: BBC News (28 May 2014). Maya Angelou Interview on HARDtalk. Accessed from: [Video Interview Link](#)

Screenshot from video:



Supporting Question 3

Featured Source C

Source C: Stanley, C.A. (2018). Research as Instrument and Advocate for Inclusive Excellence in Higher Education. In *Taking It to the Streets: The Role of Scholarship in Advocacy and Advocacy in Scholarship*, editor L.W. Perna. Johns Hopkins University Press. (Excerpt)

A public intellectual is someone who has expertise in a particular field of study and communicates that expertise not only through academic outlets, but also to the general public. An example of a public intellectual I admire is the late poet Maya Angelou. The concluding chapter in the book *Maya Angelou: Adventurous Spirit* is titled “Maya Angelou as Public Intellectual”.... A recipient of many national and international honors, including the first lifetime Reynolds Professorship of American Studies at Wake Forest University, Maya Angelou uses her personal experience and scholarly work to critique interlocking systems of oppression and advocate for dismantling them. Her works have been used to influence, for example, teacher education, race relations, identity development, and community building and to supplement scientific theory and research in the teaching of child development topics involving self-concept, self-esteem, ego resilience, effects of abuse, parenting, and cognitive development.

Supporting Question 4

Supporting Question	How have the writers' literary devices stood the test of time?
Formative Performance Task	Create a series of evidence-based claims about how the literary devices are employed.
Cognitive Skills	Point of View/Purpose: Students apply this skill by analyzing how the author's point of view influences the meaning of the text. Evidence of this skill can be found in the response to the supporting question.
Featured Sources	Source A: Coates, T. (2015) <i>Between the World and Me</i> . Book Excerpt. <i>The Atlantic</i> . Accessed from: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/
	Source B: Stone, N. (2017). <i>Dear Martin</i> . Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: https://thoughtsandafterthoughts.com/2017/01/23/dear-martin-nic-stone-cover-reveal-excerpt/
	Source C: Acevedo, E. (2018). <i>The Poet X</i> . Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: https://www.epicreads.com/blog/sneak-peek-poet-x/
	Source D: Ward, J. (2011). <i>Salvage the Bones</i> . Book Excerpt (Novel). <i>National Public Radio</i> . Accessed from: https://www.npr.org/books/titles/142344062/salvage-the-bones#excerpt

Supporting Question 4 and Formative Performance Task

The fourth supporting question—*How have the writers' literary devices stood the test of time?*—asks students to consider the legacy of Hurston, Morrison, and Angelou by assessing how the literary devices from the inquiry appear in modern texts.

Through this task, students consider the enduring nature of these three writers' engagement with racism, Blackness/colorism, social consciousness, and intellectualism. The formative performance task asks students to create a series of evidence-based claims about the ways in which these literary devices are employed by modern writers. Teachers may ask students to read the featured sources and identify tone, point of view, and/or purpose of the writing in order to support their analyses.

Featured Sources

The following sources were selected to connect Hurston, Morrison, and Angelou's writing to contemporary Black authors. Teachers should add/subtract, excerpt, modify, or annotate sources in order to respond to student needs.

SOURCE A The first source is an excerpt from Ta-Nehisi Coates' seminal work, *Between the World and Me*. Depending on the scope of this inquiry, teachers may choose to add additional excerpts. This excerpt is the opening passage from the book.

SOURCE B The first source is an excerpt from Nic Stone's novel, *Dear Martin*. This novel is told from the perspective of a Black teenager, who tries to live according to the teachings of Dr. King, recording his experiences in a journal addressed as letters to King.

SOURCE C This novel by Elizabeth Acevedo tells the story of a young girl in Harlem, who uses slam poetry to navigate her way in the world.

SOURCE D In this novel, Jesmyn Ward traces the experiences of a Black family in post-Hurricane Katrina Mississippi.

Supporting Question 4

Featured Source A

Source A: Coates, T. (2015) *Between the World and Me*. Book Excerpt. *The Atlantic*. Accessed from:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/>

Son,

Last Sunday the host of a popular news show asked me what it meant to lose my body. The host was broadcasting from Washington, D.C., and I was seated in a remote studio on the Far West Side of Manhattan. A satellite closed the miles between us, but no machinery could close the gap between her world and the world for which I had been summoned to speak. When the host asked me about my body, her face faded from the screen, and was replaced by a scroll of words, written by me earlier that week.

The host read these words for the audience, and when she finished she turned to the subject of my body, although she did not mention it specifically. But by now I am accustomed to intelligent people asking about the condition of my body without realizing the nature of their request. Specifically, the host wished to know why I felt that white America's progress, or rather the progress of those Americans who believe that they are white, was built on looting and violence. Hearing this, I felt an old and indistinct sadness well up in me. The answer to this question is the record of the believers themselves. The answer is American history.

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 4

Featured Source B

Source B: Stone, N. (2017). *Dear Martin*. Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: <https://thoughtsandafterthoughts.com/2017/01/23/dear-martin-nic-stone-cover-reveal-excerpt/>

From where he's standing across the street, Justyce can see her: Melo Taylor, ex-girlfriend, slumped over beside her Benz on the damp concrete of the FarmFresh parking lot. She's missing a shoe, and the contents of her purse are scattered around her like the guts of a pulled party popper. He knows she's stone drunk, but this is too much, even for her.

Jus shakes his head, remembering the judgment all over his best friend Manny's face as he left Manny's house not fifteen minutes ago.

The WALK symbol appears.

As he approaches, she opens her eyes, and he waves and pulls his earbuds out just in time to hear her say, "What the hell are you doing here?"

Justyce asks himself the same question as he watches her try—and fail—to shift to her knees. She falls over sideways and hits her face against the car door.

He drops down and reaches for her cheek—which is as red as the candy-apple paint job. "Damn, Melo, are you okay?"

She pushes his hand away. "What do you care?"

Stung, Justyce takes a deep breath. He cares a lot. Obviously. If he didn't, he wouldn't've walked a mile from Manny's house at three in the morning (Manny's of the opinion that Melo's "the worst thing that ever happened" to Jus, so of course he refused to give his boy a ride) to keep his drunken disaster of an ex from driving.

He should walk away right now, Justyce should.

But he doesn't.

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 4

Featured Source C

Source C: Acevedo, E. (2018). *The Poet X*. Book Excerpt (Novel). Accessed from: <https://www.epicreads.com/blog/sneak-peek-poet-x/>

The Poet X

Part I: In the Beginning Was the Word

Friday, August 24

Stoop-Sitting

The summer is made for stoop-sitting
and since it's the last week before school starts,
Harlem is opening its eyes to September.
I scope out this block I've always called home.
Watch the old church ladies, chancletas flapping
against the pavement, their mouths letting loose a
train
of island Spanish as they spread he said, she said.
Peep Papote from down the block
as he opens the fire hydrant
so the little kids have a sprinkler to run through.
Listen to honking cabs with bachata blaring
from their open windows
compete with basketballs echoing from the Little
Park.

Laugh at the viejos—my father not included—
finishing their dominoes tournament with hard slaps
and yells of “Capicu!”
Shake my head as even the drug dealers posted up
near the building smile more in the summer, their
hard scowls
softening into glue-eyed stares in the direction
of the girls in summer dresses and short shorts:
“Ayo, Xiomara, you need to start wearing dresses like
that!”
“Shit, you’d be wifed up before going back to school.”
“Especially knowing you church girls are all freaks.”
But I ignore their taunts, enjoy this last bit of
freedom,
and wait for the long shadows to tell me
when Mami is almost home from work,
when it’s time to sneak upstairs.

*See link for full excerpt.

Supporting Question 4

Featured Source D

Source D: Ward, J. (2011). *Salvage the Bones*. Book Excerpt (Novel). *National Public Radio*. Accessed from: <https://www.npr.org/books/titles/142344062/salvage-the-bones#excerpt>

Bloomsbury USA

Chapter One

THE FIRST DAY: BIRTH IN A BARE-BULB PLACE

China's turned on herself. If I didn't know, I would think she was trying to eat her paws. I would think that she was crazy. Which she is, in a way. Won't let nobody touch her but Skeet. When she was a big-headed pit bull puppy, she stole all the shoes in the house, all our black tennis shoes Mama bought because they hide dirt and hold up until they're beaten soft. Only Mama's forgotten sandals, thin-heeled and tinted pink with so much red mud seeped into them, looked different. China hid them all under furniture, behind the toilet, stacked them in piles and slept on them. When the dog was old enough to run and trip down the steps on her own, she took the shoes outside, put them in shallow ditches under the house. She'd stand rigid as a pine when we tried to take them away from her. Now China is giving like she once took away, bestowing where she once stole. She is birthing puppies.

What China is doing is nothing like what Mama did when she had my youngest brother, Junior. Mama gave birth in the house she bore all of us in, here in this gap in the woods her father cleared and built on that we now call the Pit. Me, the only girl and the youngest at eight, was of no help, although Daddy said she told him she didn't need any help. Daddy said that Randall and Skeetah and me came fast, that Mama had all of us in her bed, under her own bare burning bulb, so when it was time for Junior, she thought she could do the same. It didn't work that way. Mama squatted, screamed toward the end. Junior came out purple and blue as a hydrangea: Mama's last flower. She touched Junior just like that when Daddy held him over her: lightly with her fingertips, like she was afraid she'd knock the pollen from him, spoil the bloom. She said she didn't want to go to the hospital. Daddy dragged her from the bed to his truck, trailing her blood, and we never saw her again.

What China is doing is fighting, like she was born to do. Fight our shoes, fight other dogs, fight these puppies that are reaching for the outside, blind and wet. China's sweating and the boys are gleaming, and I can see Daddy through the window of the shed, his face shining like the flash of a fish under the water when the sun hit. It's quiet. Heavy. Feels like it should be raining, but it isn't. There are no stars, and the bare bulbs of the Pit burn.

*See link for full excerpt.

Summative Performance Task	
Compelling Question	What gets Black women heard?
Formative Performance Task	Construct an argument that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.
Cognitive Skills	Argumentative Claim: Students will apply this Cognitive Skill by using evidence from the assigned readings/text to develop claims in response to the compelling question.
	Point of view/Purpose: Students will apply this skill by analyzing the point of view of the authors and consider how that point of view or purpose influences the message or meaning of the text.

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the various ways Black women writers' work have offered a voice for the Black community, yet also challenged barriers that prevented the same voices from being heard. In spite of systemic oppression and marginalization, these women left an indelible mark not only on Black literature, but on American literature, writ large.

Students should be able to demonstrate the breadth of their understanding and ability to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students are asked to construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question: *What gets Black women heard?* Students' arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay. To support students in their writing, teachers may provide sentence starters for claims and evidence.

Argument Stems

Students' arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Black women writers are heard through employing *Blackness* in an authentic way, communicating through dialect.
- Black women writers are heard by positioning their writing within larger societal experiences of the Black (and female) community, notably oppression and marginalization.
- Black women writers are heard when they use their positionality to redefine social constructs.

EXTENSION To extend their arguments, students can have a class discussion about the enduring challenges facing Black women writers and Black women public figures. For this extension, teachers should encourage students to consider the criticisms of the featured women writers (Hurstun, Morrison, Angelou) and whether those criticisms continue into modern discourse. Additional resources in the Inquiry Overview section provide materials to help students grapple with the enduring nature of this compelling question, notably the #SayHerName campaign and discussions of intersectionality.

Taking Informed Action	
Action Question	Whose voices are heard in school reading lists?
Civic Theme	COMMUNITY: Students expand understanding and cooperation with others.
Action Task	Create a proposal of changes to school reading lists in order to make it representative of the school/local community.
Cognitive Skills	Integration of Evidence: Students apply this skill by providing clear, accurate evidence in their letter of both school demographics and the diversity of school readings.
	Informational/Explanatory Thesis: Students apply this skill by constructing explanations through well-organized, relevant ideas. Evidence of this skill can be found in the body of the Final Product.

Structure of Taking Informed Action

Taking informed action tasks have three steps to prepare students for informed, reasoned, and authentic action. The steps ask students to (1) *understand* the issues evident from the inquiry in a larger and/or current context; (2) *assess* the relevance and impact of the issues; and (3) *act* in ways that allow students to demonstrate agency in a real-world context.

For this inquiry, students have the opportunity to take informed action by drawing on their understanding of hearing the voices of marginalized communities to consider other voices that may be silent.

UNDERSTAND Students review the school and/or community’s demographics, considering the different voices represented (e.g., consider gender, ethnicity, country of origin). Students also review the reading lists in different school subjects and consider the diversity of perspectives represented (e.g., immigration stories, Latinx, Black women authors, rural authors, etc.).

ASSESS Students assess the extent to which marginalized communities are represented or absent within the reading lists.

ACT To take action, students create a proposal of changes to the reading list(s) to make it more representative of the community.

- If students’ assessments reveal the reading lists do not reflect the community, they may (1) suggest additional voices/perspectives; and/or (2) write a review in support of the reading lists.

Note on Cultural Relevance

The Taking Informed Action task was designed to have students evaluate reading lists through a lens of cultural relevance. Teachers should handle the task with extreme care. The purpose of this task is for students to consider how culturally relevant their reading lists are, *as well as* consider the diverse voices present within the lists. The purpose is *not* for students to reinforce dominant voices, even if the dominant voice accounts for the majority of

students. Likewise, the school demographic information serves as only one point of reference for considering the missing (marginalized) voices and who could be featured more prominently.

For example, a school in rural Kentucky may note that there are few voices from rural areas. To address this absence, an author like bell hooks may be suggested, a Black woman author with roots in rural Kentucky. In addition to hooks, students could suggest another rural Kentucky author, Wendell Berry, a White man. However, if students are recommending more rural voices be added, and only including White male voices, this task reinforces a monolithic understanding of rural life as White and male.

Students at the same school may note that there are a mix of rural and urban voices, but too few non-White voices, even if the school is predominantly White students. In this instance, their recommendations could include writers like bell hooks, but also include other voices from around the country (and around the globe).

CIVIC THEME This task reflects the civic theme of *community*. When students engage in community-building civic action, they expand their understanding and cooperation with others. By critiquing and advocating for a more inclusive reading list, students are seeking to expand their understanding of one another.

Note about Ways to Take Informed Action

This inquiry has a *suggested* taking informed action task. Teachers and students are encouraged to revise or adjust the task to reflect student interests, the topic/issue chosen for the task, time considerations, etc.

Taking informed action can manifest in a variety of forms and in a range of venues. They can be small actions (e.g., informed conversations) to the big (e.g., organizing a protest). For this project, students may instead express action by creating a public service announcement (as noted in the bulleted point below “Act”), organizing a panel discussion, conducting a survey and the like; these actions may take place in the classroom, the school, the local community, across the state, and around the world. What’s important is that students are authentically applying the inquiry to an out-of-classroom context. Actions should reach people outside of the classroom.

For more information about different ways students can take action, see: Muetterties, C. & Swan, K. (2019).

Guiding Taking Informed Action Graphic Organizer. *C3Teachers*. Available from:

<http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/civic-action-project/>.