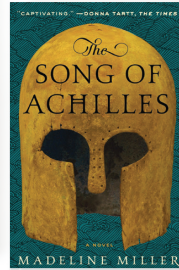
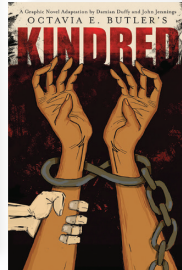
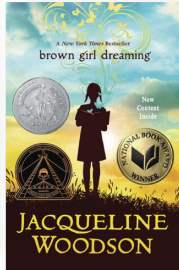
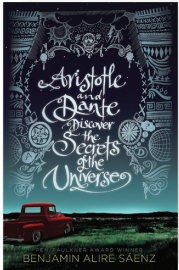


Reloading the Canon

Looking for new books to offer your students that might offer other perspectives? Us too. So we asked **PAMELA MASON, M.A.T.'70, ED.D.'75** (●), senior lecturer and director of the Ed School's Language and Literacy Program (along with librarian Adrienne Almeida) and **JABARI SELLARS, ED.M.'17** (●), middle school English teacher in Washington, D.C., for some new ideas. Here's what they recommended:



- *American Born Chinese* (Gene Luen Yang)
- *America: The Life and Times of America Chavez* (Gabby Rivera)
- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Benjamin Alire Sáenz)
- *Born Confused* (Tanuja Desai Hidier)
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Jacqueline Woodson)
- *Children of Blood and Bone* (Tomi Adeyemi)
- *Finding Langston* (Lesa Cline-Ransome)
- *Hey, Kiddo* (Jarrett Krosoczka)
- *It's Not Like It's Secret* (Misa Sugiura)
- *Kindred and Kindred, a graphic novel adaptation* (Octavia Butler)
- *Miles Morales: Spider-Man* (Jason Reynolds)
- *Prince of Cats* (Ron Wimberly)
- *Some People, Some Other Place* (J. California Cooper)
- *Song of Achilles* (Madeline Miller)
- *Swing or Rebound* (Kwame Alexander)
- *Tales of the Mighty Code Talkers* (various authors)
- *The 57 Bus* (Dashka Slater)
- *The Marrow Thieves* (Cherie Dimaline)
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston)
- *This Promise of Change: One Girl's Story in the Fight for School Equality* (Jo Ann Allen Boyce and Debbie Levy)
- *Toil & Trouble* (Mairghread Scott)
- *Your Black Friend* (Ben Passmore)

Considering that the American student population is now 50% nonwhite, the need for that mirror — for opportunities for children to see themselves and navigate a more diverse world — seems more pressing. Much like Sellars' students, children notice the lack of representation surrounding them. English teachers interviewed for this story, particularly at middle and high school levels, described how students complain about representation, cultural relevance, and boredom in text. Those complaints, especially boredom, signal to Mason a greater need for variety in the classroom.

The solution seems obvious: Add more books that represent LGBTQ issues, gender diversity, people of color, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities. But even as teachers appear aware of a need to diversify the curriculum, there can be roadblocks to making it happen. For example, there's a diversity gap in the book publishing industry regarding who gets published (mostly white authors), who gets awarded (mostly white authors), and which books make it onto school vendor booklists (mostly white creators). Add in the fact

that new books are typically more expensive than classics, says **CHRISTINA DOBBS, ED.M.'06, ED.D.'13**, an assistant professor of English at Boston University, and it can be hard to make a case for change.



Even when teachers have the support of school administrators, funding, and autonomy over book selection, they still might feel lost.

"Some teachers might think, 'I want to diversify the literature,' but don't know what to do with it," says Lecturer **VICKI JACOBS, C.A.S.'80, ED.D.'86**, a former English teacher who retired this summer as director of the Ed School's Teacher Education Program. "They need to understand the multiple contexts — including background knowledge and lived experiences — that both they and their students bring to their reading and interpretations of those texts."

This lack of understanding could explain why an elementary teacher of color from Virginia who attended a literature institute last year at the Ed School reported that she had discovered that other teachers in the school, who were predominantly white, weren't using the more representative books she pushed for in the school library.

"It's a mistake to think having the books gives people the tools to teach the books," Dobbs says. In her role training teachers, she sees that many want to have conversations about diverse books but don't know how. "We don't have evidence that teachers can close that gap independently."

Mason noticed similar apprehensions among educators, prompting her to create two professional learning experiences — an online module called Culturally Responsive Literature Instruction and its companion workshop on campus, Advancing Culturally Responsive Literature. Both programs, offered through the Ed School's Professional Education program, focus on instructional literary practices that support and value the many identities present in the 21st-century classroom.

Last fall 51 educators, mostly teachers from the United States, gathered on the Ed School campus for a weekend spent learning how to bring new texts into their classrooms. There was plenty to discuss, like how to vet new books and develop a diverse curriculum to more predictable topics about meeting standards. (Common Core doesn't identify required reading or tell you how to teach.)

Rachel Schubert, an 11th and 12th grade English teacher at Martha's Vineyard High School in Massachusetts, attended the workshop to learn from other educators who are prioritizing this work. In her diverse classroom, she aims to strike a balance between the "classics" and multicultural texts like Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Still, she knows