

SAMPLE

Penguin  
Random  
House

CLASSROOM  
LIBRARIES

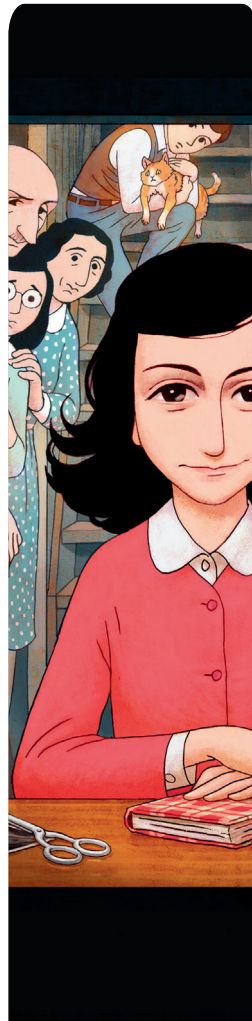
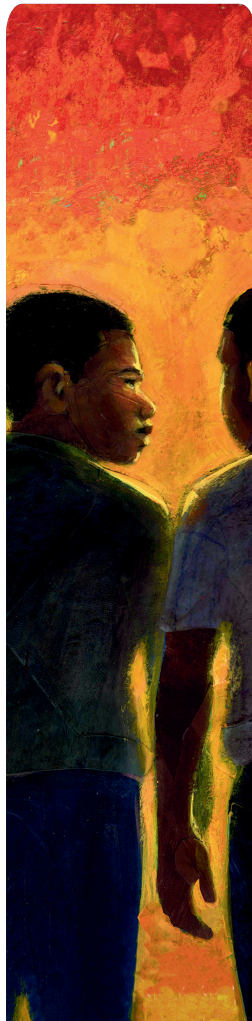
Education



# High School Collections Grade 9 and 10

— A HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS BY —

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## About the Creators



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**Cicely Lewis** is an educator and author of *Focus on Civil Rights Sit-ins (History in Pictures)*, (Lerner Publications, 2022). Her award-winning Read Woke challenge won the MAE Award for Best Literature Program for Teens and she was named the 2020 *School Library Journal* Librarian of the Year. When she is not reading, you can find Cicely writing her bimonthly column in *School Library Journal* where she shares her book recommendations.



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**Julia E. Torres** is a librarian and veteran language arts teacher in Denver, Colorado. She was a 2020 *Library Journal* Mover and Shaker and recipient of the Colorado NCTE Affiliate's 2020 Secondary Educator of Excellence Award. Julia is a teen programs administrator in a public library system in Colorado and co-author of *Liven Up Your Library: Design Engaging and Inclusive Programs for Tweens and Teens* (International Society for Technology in Education, 2022).



**Ronell Whitaker** is a high school English curriculum director in Chicagoland with over fifteen years of experience and is a champion for comics in the classroom. He is a founding member of the Lit-X teacher cohort. Ronell believes in comics, and he likes to think that comics believe in him.

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## Introduction

### Note to Teacher

When I ask my students, “What is your favorite book of all time?” I am often met with blank stares or giggles and then replies of “*Captain Underpants?!?*” Reading choice and access to classroom libraries frequently disappear after middle school as students enter high school. High school students are not given the same opportunity to read high-interest novels as they once were. If independent reading is incorporated into the curriculum, it is typically accompanied by dense reading logs, pop quizzes, and dialectical journals. There simply isn’t much “reading for fun” during high school. The Penguin Random House High School Collections aim to change the paradigm and to support choice and access, and provide students the opportunity to read relevant, high-interest, diverse texts and graphic novels. The authors of this guide firmly believe that classroom libraries are at the heart of any curriculum and offer a transformative and powerful resource for both students and educators alike.

As educators, we know the value of literacy and the importance of creating a reading culture for students. However, many of our students do not see themselves as readers due, in no small part, to the books they are required to read books of little interest or relevance.

Teachers must go beyond the literary canon and incorporate a wide range of culturally responsive texts that represent different experiences, characters, and culture, including those often marginalized, and connect students with the power of literacy. These collections provide educators with the books and resources to diversify and enrich reading environments for all students.

### Why Independent and Choice Reading?

“I liked that there were many options to choose from and that we could choose a book that we want and read at our own pace, it wasn’t forced, and it made reading more enjoyable.”

— Sammar, eleventh-grade student

Sammar and her classmates were surveyed at the end of the school year about their choice reading experience. Her testimonial reflects two key foundations of the collections and accompanying educator handbook: **access** and **choice**. When students are given a number of texts to browse and select from, they are more likely to find one that interests them. Creating a reading culture in your classroom is a collaborative effort. Teachers should share their passion for reading, get to know their students’ interests, and offer recommendations that can help connect students to books they are likely to engage in and enjoy.

In addition to anecdotal evidence, there is much research on student choice that points to its multivalent impact and importance: “[W]hen students shifted from assigned reading to choice reading, there was ‘increased reading volume, a reduction in students failing the state test, and changes in peer relationships, self-regulation, and conceptions of self.’”<sup>1</sup>

In 2004, Dr. S. Jay Samuels and Dr. Yi-Chen Wu conducted a scientific research study that corroborated the findings of Richard C. Anderson, Paul T. Wilson, and Linda G. Fielding, concluding that the more time students spend reading, the higher their achievement compared to a control group.<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 1**

**Variation in amount of Independent Reading**

Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988<sup>3</sup>

Minutes a Day	Words a Year	Percentile Rank for Reading Volume
67.3	4,733,000	98th
33.4	2,375,000	90th
16.9	1,168,000	70th
9.2	601,000	50th
4.3	251,000	30th
1.0	51,000	10th
0	0	2nd

Collectively, the research and our own work has shown the transformative power of choice reading and classroom libraries. Classrooms that provide time for students to freely select and read books of high interest, focus on fostering and affirming students' reader identities, and include a large selection of diverse stories at varying levels will increase overall engagement, improve academic performance, and build lifelong learners ready to participate in an ever-changing and demanding world.

## Ways to Implement Independent and Choice Reading

Let's be real, it can be challenging to make the most out of a fifty-minute class period. Too often, performance and knowledge building are over-emphasized in class, as opposed to a focus on process. As stated earlier, quite simply, the more time students spend reading, the better readers they become. Providing time for independent reading is one of the best ways to ramp up proficiency and develop students' sense of themselves as readers and learners. Every academic year should have at least one independent reading unit (if not more).

Here are a few suggestions to get started.

### Book Tastings

Book tastings are a great way to guide students in deciding which book to choose and what influences go into making that choice.

At the beginning of the unit, it is important that students pick books they are interested in reading. You can accomplish this by hosting a book tasting in your classroom.

Place the books on tables or desks and allow students to “taste” the books by completing the following four steps:

1. React to the cover of the book. What do you think the book will be about?
2. Read the summary on the jacket flap or back of the book. Additionally, you can make available to students (or have them research) what book critics have said about the book, reader reviews (Goodreads or online booksellers), and social media (such as TikTok and Reddit).
3. Read the first two pages of the book.
4. On a scale of one to ten, rate the book on how likely you want to read more.

After completing these steps, students will list their top three books and select one of the books as their reading selection.

Have students write down why they picked the book and then later, after they've read the book, see if the reading experience met, exceeded, or fell short of their expectations. Would they recommend the book to their peers?

### Literature Circles

Literature circles are a very popular classroom strategy, and for good reason. A great alternative to the whole-class read, “lit circles” focus on choice. It allows students to find authentic and meaningful ways to engage with texts. Lit circles' emphasis on student-led instruction is an important way for students to express themselves, harness their unique skills, and build connections with one another.

If students are reading the same novel at the same time, suggest that they meet weekly together to discuss their reading. The group, or lit circle, decides how many pages they want to read by the next meeting. Typically, there are roles (e.g., questioner, summarizer) assigned to group members with specific writing responsibilities before the meeting. When the group comes together to meet, they share their writing and discuss.

**Typical Member Roles:**

- **Discussion Director/Questioner** – Develops a list of open-ended questions about the reading to pose to the group.
- **Literary Luminary** – Selects important quotes from the assigned reading to discuss.
- **Vocabulary Enricher** – Jots down unfamiliar vocabulary words, defines them, and explains their significance to that portion of the text.
- **Summarizer** – Creates a short summary of the reading and its key points.

If there are less or more members in groups, roles can be removed, or additional ones can be created/duplicated.

At the very first meeting, the teacher should instruct students to choose a role from above. Each role has a corresponding handout that the student completes for homework before the next meeting. There are many versions of these handouts available online for free. Once students choose roles, they should discuss and decide how much they will read by their next meeting. Their work on the handouts should correspond to the assigned reading. The cycle repeats each week until students complete their novels.

**How to Use the Collections and Thematic Guides**

The Penguin Random House High School Collections for ninth and tenth grade are intended to be an exploration of a wide array of voices all addressing the human condition from a variety of vantage points. Though there have been tens of thousands of books written, including books especially for young people, what students are assigned in class remains limited to a very narrow set of titles. Books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *1984*, and *The Catcher in the Rye* reflect the restrictive authority of the literary canon. One of the most valuable and enduring gifts we can give a young person is the opportunity to develop a reader identity through the power of reading choice.

These curated collections have been assembled to not only broaden the selection for all students, but also to better reflect their lived realities and interests, constructed as they are around unifying themes including belonging, identity, and resiliency.

Suggested activities, thematic connections, and essential questions are provided along with pedagogical resources to help educators incorporate the themes into their curriculum/ELA block.

We purposefully included three copies of each title, so students can read the same text, but even students who read different titles still should be able to connect with one another and share their collective reading experiences, based on the unifying themes of the collections. Students should be encouraged to explore the books as their curiosity leads them. We also suggest that educators use these collections as an opportunity to read and learn alongside your students to help develop your classroom reading culture.

Educators may find these collections useful as part of a professional learning community or book club to engage colleagues in deepening their understanding of the topics and to better prepare them for “unpacking” the texts with students.

Inclusivity is central to the compilation of these collections. We sought to create synergy amongst the collections and themes to represent the ever-changing landscape of our nation. As a multicultural group of authors with unique experiences and backgrounds, we were also focused on creating a guide that welcomes educators and invites readers to experience the joy and empowerment of reading. In that spirit, we have thoughtfully curated this collection and accompanying guides to be representative of the diversity we have in our schools, including neurodivergent and multilingual learners.

Ultimately, educators can use these unique, engaging collections to cultivate a classroom of care to better reflect and reach their students for academic and lifelong success. Educational psychology professor DeLeon Gray impactfully states, “That when students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, it can increase their educational success and motivational outcomes in multiple ways. Teachers can help create this feeling of belonging by building connections between classroom and community.”<sup>4</sup>

Through literacy that empowers young people, we can build a more just society. In order to be inspired to feel like our changes matter, it is important to feel that we have voice and choice. One of the most emblematic shifts of the past two decades in education has been the shift toward more culturally responsive and sustaining education. When we work to respond to a student’s sense of belonging (or lack thereof) through literacy education, we show them they matter and help them develop a sense of community.

## References

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- <sup>4</sup> Bowen, J. (2021). “Why is it Important for Students to Feel a Sense of Belonging at School? ‘Students Choose to be in Environments That Make Them Feel a Sense of Fit,’ Says Associate Professor DeLeon Gray.” Retrieved April 3, 2023, from the North Carolina State University College of Education News website: <https://prhlink.com/fmref3>.



## Collection 1:

### **The Magic Within Us: Analyzing Identity and Power through Science Fiction & Fantasy**

Lorena Germán and Julia E. Torres

#### **Overview**

Identity is a common theme of study in ninth grade, but the use of science fiction and fantasy to do so is innovative. Often, the study of identity is centered on texts dealing with struggle and oppression that aim to inspire empathy in students or offer them the opportunity to see themselves. This intention is good. Yet, we want to propose a joyful and magical exploration of identity that can yield equally meaningful discussion and learning.

This collection seeks to explore identity from different lenses, through which students can imagine themselves and come to understand others through mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.<sup>1</sup> We also want to intertwine the topic of identity with an analysis of the role of power, so young people can explore “how differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society.”<sup>2</sup> By focusing on empowered and heroic figures, the possibility to take hold of and shape one’s identity emerges. In this way, literacy education can serve as a tool to repair the harm done by dominant narratives in society—those narratives that pervade the collective imagination of a society, and its people, and are carried from generation to generation in the stories we lift up as worthy of academic study.

This collection is comprised of fantasy, science fiction, and other speculative fiction from cultures and identities that have rich textual lineages<sup>3</sup>, the texts that inform and shape our reading identities,<sup>3</sup> which are not often read by students. Historically, schools have lacked diverse representation when it comes to assigning books in these genres, relying instead on a narrow and unvarying list of titles such as *Frankenstein*, *The Giver*, *Brave New World*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*, amongst others. Education has an important part to play in the formation of a textual lineage. The titles chosen in this collection offer books that more accurately reflect the world students live in and provide an imaginative lens to see humanity beyond its present-day limitations. These books aim to affirm, uplift, and inspire young people to aspire to greatness both in the present and in the future.

While inhabiting other worlds and other ways of being through their reading, students have the chance to practice empathy and envision themselves differently. As they witness characters in alternate realities breaking the norms of their worlds, young people will call into question those

very norms in our society. We want readers to find the magic within them; to dream; to aspire. The ability of literature to expand ideas of what is possible and allowable is especially powerful in these two genres.

This is why using these two genres to explore identity can be so invigorating and rewarding. When teaching young people about identity, it's important to think in a humanizing way. Instead of focusing on “hard skills” alone, creating space in the curriculum to explore the “soft skills”—who students are, who they want to be, and what is true to them—is integral to their intellectual and personal development. Classrooms that encourage students to think imaginatively about what it means to be human and what identity means are ones where students understand that they are valued and accepted.

### Essential Questions

1. What is the role of science in science fiction and fantasy? Is it different in the two genres?
2. What connections and conflicts do you see between science and religion or faith?
3. Do you see any patterns between the faraway past and the distant future as explored in this collection?
4. Do you think parallels exist between the books and our world? Consider politics, the natural world, and culture in your answer.
5. What role, if any, does superstition play in shaping the narrative?
6. How does creating imagined worlds help us to see and shape the world around us?
7. What social, political, or socio-economic forces influence our interpretation of what is “real”? What obstacles, if any, do the protagonists overcome that would not exist in the real world?

### Anchor Texts

Title	Author
<i>Akata Witch</i>	Nnedi Okorafor
<i>Star Child</i>	Ibi Zoboi
<i>The Gilded Ones</i>	Namina Forna
<i>The United States of Cryptids</i>	J. W. Ocker

**Project/Lesson Ideas**

***The United States of Cryptids***

In J.W. Ocker’s *The United States of Cryptids*, readers are introduced to famous legendary local monsters. Long-held stories about their existence are based on unreliable eyewitness accounts, drawings, or videos, with no solid or testable evidence, such as a body to dissect, to deem them scientifically factual. A cryptid “is a creature or species whose existence is scientifically unproven,” (p. 12) Ocker writes. That begs the questions: *What is true? How does one establish a fact?* These questions are also applicable to conversations about identity. Is our identity simply an internal process in which we self-identify, or does society make us conform to a sense of self? This book is a fun and interesting read for any young person who is into monsters, mysteries, or fantasy and is ready to push their thinking toward analyzing identity.

The book is structured by dividing the United States into regions and sharing cryptids from each of those regions. In short descriptions, readers see drawings of these cryptids, stories of the people in those communities, and more. For example, the first section of the book focuses on the northeast of the United States. In total, there are eighteen cryptids listed. Consider the activities below to engage readers.

Oral Presentations	Create Profiles	Make Connections
<p>Students can select two or three of the cryptids listed, read the passages, and share their findings with the class.</p>	<p>Students can select four or five of the cryptids listed, create profiles for them, and hang these up in the room.</p>	<p>Students can come together and share thoughts about their readings and create a list of parallels between the cryptids across the regions and their stories.</p>

The identity-focused portion of the analysis comes in through the discussion questions posed to students and/or the writing portion. Below are some questions you can use to prompt students to think of identity through this book:

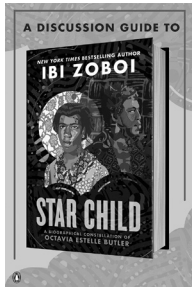
- How are these stories tied to the land, landscape, and region? How might cultural shifts push these stories into silence?
- How might the stories of these cryptids reflect the identity of the people in their respective communities?
- Explain what you think about scientific truth versus community truth. How might the latter strengthen a community’s identity?

***The Gilded Ones***

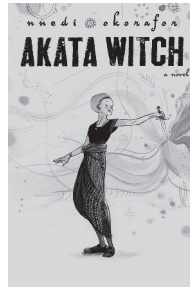
*The Gilded Ones* by Namina Forna is a powerful and beautiful story that features a strong Black female main character who redeems herself by embracing the magic within her. Starting with a basic literary analysis of this story, and then narrowing it into a study about identity can be an engaging and formative experience for students to understand themselves, as well as their place in our world. The following chart outlines quotes or moments in the text that can be used for this analysis with corresponding prompts. The prompts can be used for discussion or written tasks.

Moments	Prompt
<p>Deka speaking about Britta: “She needs to be accepted, to be part of a community. Except I’m the only community she has now—she and I connected by our demon ancestors and the golden blood that binds us.” (p. 59)</p>	<p>What does this reveal about Deka’s understanding of her new identity?</p>
<p>When Deka is strategizing for battle: “The emperors of Otera made a crucial mistake in dealing with our kind. They taught us alaki to suffer, but they also taught us to survive—to conquer. And we will use those lessons.” (p. 415)</p>	<p>What is Forna, the author, saying about what we learn from suffering? How might that help shape our sense of identity?</p>
<p>Deka accepts her reality: “I’m a demon. I know it the moment I open my eyes. I’m still chained in the cellar, but my body is whole again.” (p. 30)</p>	<p>In this moment of the story, what is the power in Deka accepting her identity and who/what she is? Have you ever had a moment where you realized who you were? How did you handle it?</p>
<p>Deka experiences two communities: her first community, which betrays her once she is found to be impure, and her second community, which values her skills and gifts. The very thing she fears—being a demon—turns out to be her strength.</p>	<p>What does this character arc reveal to us about the evolution of identity? How does Deka’s growth as a person reflect her understanding of where she belongs? How does her community help her grow into her identity?</p>

**Additional Projects/Lesson Ideas**



*Star Child*  
 Educator Guide



*Akata Witch*  
 Teaching Resources

**The Larger Conversation**

High schoolers reading science fiction and fantasy have the opportunity to reframe their ideas of self and others, to discover the magic within themselves and their communities. We know that literacy education plays an important role in the formation of cultural capital through the textual lineage that learners develop as they read and analyze literature in educational environments. Furthermore, science fiction and fantasy offer opportunities for imagining ourselves as more than we are, more than we have been, and more than society has imagined us to be. Though Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s “Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors” language has often been distilled to emphasize the part of the framework that offers opportunities for students to see themselves reflected in character identities, plot, and setting, the actual framework is so much larger. As important as it is to see ourselves in the stories we read, it is perhaps more important to disseminate stories that depict those society has traditionally categorized as “other,” “separate from,” and, in some cases, “less than.”

Additionally, in mainstream academic spaces, authors like Octavia E. Butler have often been excluded in favor of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Isaac Asimov. This text set offers teachers and readers an opportunity to construct a textual lineage that is inclusive and expansive, and to do as Dr. Bishop reminds us: celebrate, bear witness, nurture, situate within wider cultural contexts, and honor tradition through story as a way to make meaning. Comprehensive literacy education offers opportunities to read, as well as write. Rather than overemphasizing the skills needed to decode science fiction and fantasy texts, this set will provide an opportunity for writers to study how a story is crafted, and imagine how they might do so themselves. These science fiction and fantasy stories are not the only ones with origins outside Western Europe, but they do bring a fresh perspective. These are stories intended to spark curiosity, to encourage readers to seek out the unknown, and create new ideas and identities.

**References**

- <sup>1</sup> Bishop, R. (1990). “Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.” *Collected Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), ix–xi.
- <sup>2</sup> CTLT Indigenous Initiatives, University of British Columbia, “Positionality & Intersectionality.” <https://prhlink.com/ctlrtref1>.
- <sup>3</sup> Tatum, A (2009). *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Adolescent Males*. Heinemann; First Edition.

## Looking for More Student and Classroom Favorites?

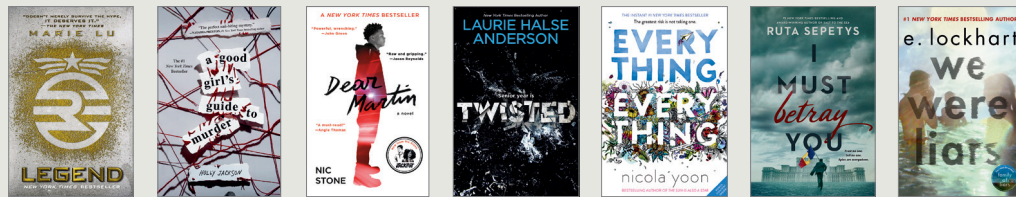
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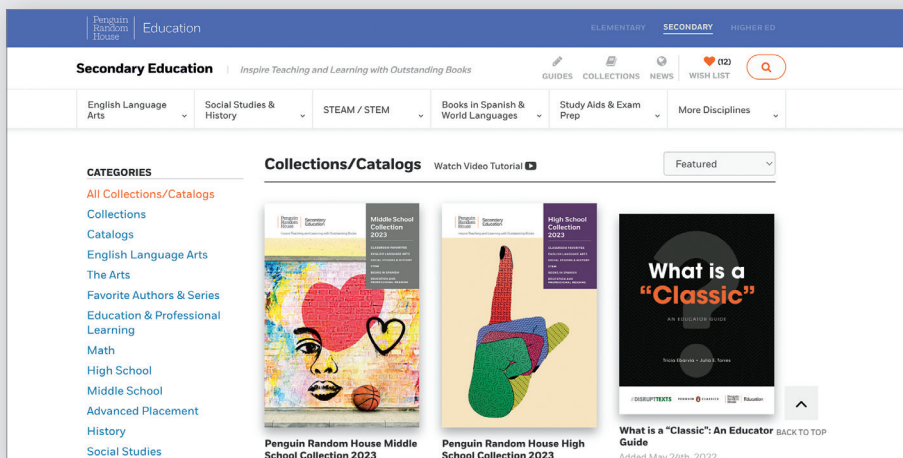
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