



## **Proposal: A More Inclusive Curriculum**

*New Trier Coalition for Diversity, July 2020*

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## Introduction

The New Trier Coalition for Diversity is dedicated to working hand-in-hand with the administration to make New Trier a more diverse and inclusive setting for all students. Therefore, we have compiled our ideas, as well as those from current students and alumni across the community, to create a comprehensive proposal for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year. Our proposal focus this year is curriculum; we spotlight the English curriculum with a preliminary recommendation for Social Studies.

We will carry out the initiatives in our proposal throughout the school year. We are devoted to collecting data from surveys, enlisting our student representatives to work with groups and faculty, and constructing revisions to existing programs. In quarterly meetings with the administration, we would like to discuss the effectiveness of initiatives so that adjustments can be made for the next quarter and beyond.

We completely understand that the school must abide by various Illinois state standards. We empathize with teachers' challenges in balancing their course syllabi. Still, New Trier can make a concerted effort to better represent minority voices, which not only compose a large portion of the nation, but also a strong percentage of the New Trier community.

## English

English classes hold enormous power in broadening student perspectives. The New Trier Coalition for Diversity believes the English department should concretize the values espoused in the 2019-2025 plan by committing to changes in the curricula. We have provided a list of book recommendations for the most taken classes in each grade level. We hope to work side by side with the English department to discuss how books are currently chosen for classes, how our recommendations may be incorporated into syllabi, and how selection can be improved moving forward.

We also understand that book selection alone is insufficient for comprehensive and effective reform. Therefore, we are also dedicated to devising strategies for instruction and providing the English department with feedback for teacher conduct.

### **Methodology:**

We have thoughtfully selected book and essay recommendations based on considerable conversation with high school students and alumni, New Trier teachers, and university educators. We have made the effort to ensure these selections are of suitable difficulty for their grade levels and match class themes, as per their course descriptions. We have also credited books that are already in the curriculum.

# Freshman Year

## English 1 (levels 2-4)

English 1 classes focus on thematic, universal questions central to identity while building students' writing and literary analysis skills. **Given the absence of regional or historical focuses, these introductory classes serve as excellent opportunities to expose students to a variety of authors and regions of the world.** Additionally, freshman year is an especially critical time to include diverse voices in the curriculum given these classes set the tone for the rest of students' time at New Trier.

As such, we have compiled a list of books that we recommend English 1 classes incorporate into their curricula. Each of the following selections fits the course focus, exploring identity through family, race, adversity, and other avenues. They are also written by authors from underrepresented groups. Each English 1 class should incorporate selections from at least three different categories into their syllabi:

### Asian

- *First They Killed My Father* (Loung Ung): Powerful account of growing up during the Cambodian genocide. Covers themes of family, courage, and conflict. Provides a glimpse into genocide that is not often covered in history classes.
- *Joy Luck Club* (Amy Tan): Examines the American experience and prejudices faced by a group of Chinese women and their daughters. Provides insight into the Asian immigrant perspective. Highlights the role tradition and family play in one's image of oneself.

### Black

- *Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe): Renowned best-seller covering the colonization and Westernization of Africa. Illustrates the ways in which blending of cultures and assimilation can impact a community's identity. Has been in some classes.
- *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Alan Paton): Exposes readers to the race relations that South Africa experienced in past decades and the rifts that still exist today. Adds to narratives of race through examination in other countries.
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Rebecca Skloot): Addresses important ethical topics in science and medicine, including the history of racial discrimination against Black people. Has been in some classes.
- *Sisters of the Yam* (bell hooks): Reflects on how the emotional health of Black women has been and continues to be impacted by sexism and racism. Shows the ways in which enculturation shapes one's image of self worth and belonging. Has been in some classes.
- *Home* (Toni Morrison): Follows the homecoming of a Black Korean war veteran as he returns to the segregated south and his family there. Along the way, he discovers the role one's past plays on shaping identity. Has been in some classes.

### Jewish

- *Night* (Elie Wiesel): Best-selling novel follows a Jewish man during the Holocaust and his

experience in a death camp. Addresses the impact of government and political events on the concept of self worth.

- *Diary of a Young Girl* (Anne Frank): A collection of letters written by Anne Frank in hiding during the Holocaust. Widely acclaimed nonfiction title.
- *Under a Cruel Star* (Heda Kovály): Memoir detailing the author's time in concentration camps and in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Uprising. Simple but gripping writing style. Themes of dignity and one's personal relation to truth. Recommended by Yale Professor of History Marci Shore.

#### Latinx

- *Library of Babel* (Jorge Luis Borges): Impactful novella that serves as allegory for knowledge. Inspires discussion on what it means to learn and how knowledge impacts us as students and as people.
- *Before We Were Free* (Julia Alvarez): Novel that follows the story of a 12 year-old girl in the Dominican Republic who struggles to find freedom from a corrupt government all while dealing with the difficulties of adolescence.
- *The House on Mango Street* (Sandra Cisneros): A series of vignettes illustrating the experiences and challenges faced by a variety of characters in a predominantly Latinx neighborhood in Chicago. Examines how race impacts social mobility and community identity.

#### Native American

- *There, There* (Tommy Orange): This novel follows multiple Native American characters as they travel to the Big Oakland Powwow, each with a unique story and perspective. This chorus of voices shows the plight of urban Native Americans grappling with a complex history and its impacts on self image. Recommended by Yale PhD candidate Peter Conroy.
- *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me* (Sherman Alexie): Powerful nonfiction memoir of Native American author's experiences growing up on a reservation and his self-image as a product of his race.

## Sophomore Year

### English 2 (levels 2-4)

English 2 classes focus on "British, American, and world authors" as well as "18th through 21st century works." They also explore topics such as the search for self-definition and the struggle for self-knowledge. While summer reading books have done a solid job presenting worldly perspectives, classes especially emphasize British and American literature as the year goes on. As a result, many regions of the world are omitted from syllabi. This is unfortunate considering the breadth of seminal works that fit the course descriptions.

English 2 classes should make a concerted effort to incorporate global works in their syllabi throughout the year. At least three of the following texts should be adopted into the syllabi for each English 2 class:

- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel Garcia Marquez): This novel tells the complete history of a fictional Colombian town serving as an allegory for the role one's past plays in shaping the present.
- *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* (Clementine Wamariya): The memoir of a New Trier alum as she flees the Rwandan genocide and moves to Kenilworth. Highly relevant to New Trier students.
- *The Thing Around Your Neck* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) accompanied by the video "The Danger of a Single Story": Short story collection covering various settings but ultimately centered around the collision of cultures and the struggle to reconcile them. Video sparks important discussion on the power of stories to shape stereotypes, identity, and more. Pair can serve as an alternative to *The Intuitionist*. Recommended by Yale Professor of English Cajetan Iheka. Author already in some classes.
- *Beloved* (Toni Morrison). Has been in some classes and recommended by multiple English professors. Novel inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner who escaped slavery only to have the ghosts and trauma of her past continue to haunt her.
- *The Woman Warrior* (Maxine Hong Kingston): A memoir written by a Chinese American woman who finds her identity through her mother's folk tales and her own experiences.
- *The Namesake* (Jhumpa Lahiri): Pulitzer-Prize winning book that addresses assimilation, clash of cultures, and the immigrant experience, all through an Indian perspective.
- *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Junot Diaz): Illustrates the perspective of a Dominican immigrant growing up in New Jersey. Highlights history of the Dominican Republic and its impact on immigrants.
- *A State of Freedom* (Neel Mukherjee): Five stories from global perspectives encompassing a central theme of displacement and belonging in the developing world.
- *The Round House* (Louise Erdrich): This engaging novel follows a 13 year-old boy as he deals with the repercussions of an attack on his Native American mom. It serves to highlight the injustices (particularly legal) encountered by many Native Americans.
- *Never Let Me Go* (Kazuo Ishiguro): Follows a group of children in an English boarding school whose fates are already decided for them. Author is already in some classes.

## Junior Year

### English 3 (levels 2 & 3)

English 3 classes emphasize the "diversity of American voices and themes on spirituality, nature, race, gender, sexuality, politics, and social mobility" and the "cultural, philosophical, and political diversity of a people trying to realize their dreams." Given the broad and diverse themes covered, we believe at least two of the following texts should be incorporated into each of the English 3 classes:

- *The Fire Next Time* (James Baldwin): Powerful essays on racial justice written amid the emerging Civil Rights Movement by a renowned essayist and activist. Author is already in some classes.

- *The Tortilla Curtain* (T.C. Boyle): A Californian couple and pair of undocumented immigrants cross paths in the desert resulting in an eye-opening comment on politics, race, and other contemporary topics. A master class in impartial narration. Already in some classes.
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Frederick Douglass): Memoir and treatise on abolition written by the famed activist Frederick Douglass. One of the most poignant and famous accounts written by a former slave during this time and an important primary source. Already in some classes.
- *The Bluest Eye* (Toni Morrison): Heralded novel that tells the story of a young African-American girl who grows up during the years following the Great Depression. Prevailing themes of race, class and gender. Author is already in some classes.
- *The Color of Water* (James McBride): A Black man's tribute to his white mother, this book serves as a much needed account of the multiracial experience that is rarely covered in school. Already in some classes.
- *The Submission* (Amy Walden): When a Muslim American is selected to design the 9/11 memorial, an examination of religion, humanity, and our fundamental similarities ensues. Provides a variety of perspectives illustrating many tensions in modern America.

### AP Language and Composition: English 3 (Level 4)

In AP Language and Composition, “students work within the framework of American literature to develop critical reading skills” and gain an extensive understanding of rhetorical strategies. As it stands, many students believe the current teachers do an excellent job constructing a challenging and thoughtful curriculum. Still, the class could include a more diverse array of voices. If the department would like to incorporate more diverse texts, we support their efforts to do so.

### English 3-Team: American Studies (Levels 9 & 4)

American Studies focuses on an integrated education and attempts to “[erase] disciplinary distinctions between social studies and English.” The class also “encourages students to appreciate the richness and diversity of the United States by exploring its culture from an interdisciplinary perspective.” Based on student feedback, this class is often considered to be one of the most inclusive English courses and has the most diverse selection of readings. The following books are additional selections that American Studies classes can consider including in their curriculum:

- *Heavy* (Kiese Laymon): Illustrates growing up a Black son to a complicated mother in Mississippi. From his early experiences of sexual violence to his time in New York as a college professor, Laymon charts his complex relationship with his mother, grandmother, and contemporary problems
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Maya Angelou): This text follows the impact of racism on Angelou's self-worth, as she transforms to a dignified woman coping with racism in the 21st century.
- *A World More Concrete* (Nathan Connolly): This book examines how capitalism affected the color line and made segregation profitable throughout the 20th century.

- *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates): Written in the form of a letter to a teenage son, this book is a powerful reflection on the feelings and realities of being Black in the US. Structure and writing illustrate key rhetorical strategies. Already in some classes.
- *My Grandfather's Son* (Clarence Thomas): This is the story of Clarence Thomas, the second African American to serve on the Supreme Court, told in his own words. He elaborates on the prejudices and challenges he has faced while breaking barriers. Note: Anita Hill's allegations should be mentioned.
- *Hillbilly Elegy* (J.D. Vance): A nonfiction analysis of the values of Vance's family and their relation to the social problems of his hometown in Ohio.

## Senior Year

### AP Literature and Composition: English 4 (Level 4)

AP Literature and Compositions aims to place authors "in dialogue with one another across time and culture" by following characters who have been "alienated from their own culture, or in conflict with a different culture."

We have made special note of the fact that each semester has a different focus, the first on the study of poetry, novella and novel as forms, and the second on drama and film. Our recommendations reflect these differences. We believe that each AP Literature and Composition should add at least two of the first semester texts and at least one of the second semester selections from the following list:

#### First semester

- *Canto General* (Pablo Neruda): Neruda depicts the continuous struggle against oppression in Latin American history as he explores his communist sympathies and conflicts of national pride.
- *Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison): National Book Award winner chronicling the travels of its narrator, a young, nameless Black man, as he moves through the levels of American intolerance and cultural blindness.
- *An American Sunrise* (Joy Harjo): Powerful collection of poems by the first Native American Poet Laureate of the United States that explores Harjo's beginnings in the native rights movement, her personal life, and her reckoning with injustice.
- *Poems* (Gwendolyn Brooks): Covers the everyday life of urban Black Americans and ordinary struggles. First African American to win a Pulitzer Prize.
- *Songs of Flying Dragons* (Jeong In-ji, translated by Peter Lee): A compilation of poems about the founding of Joseon. Would go nicely with a context lesson about Korean Neo-Confucianism and its parallels with the Enlightenment in the West. Recommended by Princeton Professor of East Asian Studies, Ksenia Chizhova.

#### Second semester



- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (August Wilson): Beautiful window into the Black American experience. Details race, art, religion and the historic exploitation of Black recording artists by white producers.
- *A Raisin in the Sun* (Lorraine Hansberry): This acclaimed play tracks the hopes and aspirations of a struggling family living on the South Side of Chicago amid segregation in the 1950s.
- *Moonlight*: Beautiful film capturing the journey to manhood for a young Black man growing up in Miami. Poignantly handles themes of poverty, sexuality and identity, and race. Cited as one of the best films of the 21st century.

### Senior Writers' Seminar (Levels 9 & 4)

In Senior Writers' Seminars, students "read a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts, but they do so as writers, discovering and analyzing literary techniques they can incorporate in their own writing." Given the absence of a guiding theme, this class can incorporate authors from many different backgrounds and of various writing styles. Therefore, at least three of the following texts should be added to the syllabi in Senior Writers' Seminar classes:

- *Labyrinths* (Jorge Luis Borges): Collection of short stories and essays by one of the most influential authors in world literature. Also provides a unique glimpse into the genre of magical realism.
- *Black Boy* (Richard Wright): Memoir detailing Wright's coming of age in the Jim Crow South. Explores poverty, masculinity, and religion. Ultimately serves as an honest and profound depiction of racism. Chicago and inner cities mentioned.
- *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* (Haruki Murakami): About the author's love of running and preparation for a marathon, this memoir provides great ideas and techniques for students writing about their passions in college application essays.
- *Homegoing* (Yaa Gyasi): Follows the lineage of women from Ghana as they define the American experience and how one's heritage shapes an image of self. Important themes on identity, growth, and culture.
- *Bells in Winter* (Czesław Miłosz): Poems that capture Polish culture between the two world wars, the harsh reality of World War II, and the role of the poet in the postwar world
- *Just Mercy* (Bryan Stevenson): An autobiography of Stevenson's experience creating the Equal Justice Initiative to represent minority death row inmates in the South. This book illustrates the profound injustice in the U.S. legal system for many minorities. Also serves as a useful example of how to write compelling narratives about oneself for college application essays.

### Literature and Film (Levels 2 & 3)

Literature and Film "helps students explore a variety of essential questions and thematic subjects to think critically about what it means to be a citizen of the world in the 21st century." While the class is unbounded by any regions of the world, the current films are heavily Western. This is unfortunate given international films feature distinct directorial styles that challenge conventional Western narratives and provoke unique reflection on

elements of storytelling, visuals, and more. To improve representation of international artistry, each Literature and Film class should incorporate at least two movies and two books from the list below.

Movies:

- *12 Years a Slave*, accompanied by “Steve McQueen and Henry Louis Gates Talk *12 Years a Slave*” and “Should a film try to depict slavery?” (Brody): This powerful award-winning film is an adaptation of the 1853 memoir of the same name by Solomon Northup, a free Black man who is kidnapped and sold into slavery. Prevailing theme of dignity and finding meaning in the face of atrocity. The film sparks important discussion on contemporary topics such as the depiction of suffering in film and its purpose.
- *Baraka*: Visually immersive movie experience that surveys people, places and events from around the world. It defies conventional narrative and would challenge students through its rare and stunning visuals with no dialogue. Has been featured in World History classes.
- *Moonlight*: Beautiful film capturing the journey to manhood for a young Black man growing up in Miami. Poignantly handles themes of poverty, sexuality and identity, and race. Cited as one of the best films of the 21st century.
- *Roma*: Acclaimed slice-of-life movie that traces a middle-class family's maid in Mexico City in the early 1970s. The black-and-white film features unique storytelling style and cinematography.
- *Parasite*: Best-Picture winning South Korea film that follows members of a poor family who scheme to become employed by a wealthy family by infiltrating their household. Timely and important social themes.
- *A Separation*: Powerful Iranian drama about a couple's disagreement over where and how to live. Thoughtfully portrays religious and social divisions in Iran. Already in some classes.

Books:

- *Story of Your Life* (Ted Chiang): Eventually serving as the basis for the movie *Arrival*, this novella centers around linguistics, time, and determinism. Profoundly covers complex emotional and philosophical issues.
- *The Underground Railroad* (Colson Whitehead): Imagining an alternate reality, this novel is an odyssey through time as well as space. Innovatively approaches slave narratives and history. Would be interesting to discuss the unique style and concept. Author is already in some classes.
- *American Born Chinese* (Gene Yang): Stories presented in a comic book format. Highlights challenges facing young Chinese Americans trying to understand and fit in with American culture. Already in some classes.
- *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* (Michael Dorris): Tells the story of three generations of Native American women starting in the present day and moving backward. Interesting style would be a good topic of discussion for storytelling style.

### Global Voices (level 4)

Global Voices “engages students in a comparative study of literature from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.” This class is one of the most diverse and inclusive offerings at New Trier. Unfortunately, the class frequently gets cancelled due to low enrollment. To address this problem, the English department should offer Global Voices across more grades

(sophomore and junior) and levels (2E, 2, 3). Additionally, the class can incorporate AP standards into its curriculum to become AP Global Voices, which would attract more students. Overall, this unique class has the potential to serve as a valuable alternative to customary English classes.

### Great Books (level 3 and AP level 4)

Great Books focuses on philosophical and literary texts from the Western canon. Still, there are many worldly thinkers who would complement the themes and topics covered in the current syllabi. Additionally, given this is many students' primary exposure to philosophy during their high school experiences, including more worldly authors would greatly expand students' perspectives and perceptions. Therefore, we suggest Great Books classes add at least three of the following texts into their syllabi:

- *Waiting for the Barbarians* (J.M. Coetzee): Award-winning novel addressing colonization, the significance of obligation and the banality of moral action. Would be a terrific alternative to *Heart of Darkness*, which has received underwhelming response from students. Already in some classes.
- *Art of War* (Sun Tzu): Seminal work on the art of living. Details how to outmaneuver an opponent without having to engage in physical battle. Would go well with *Hamlet*.
- *Analects* (Confucius): Renowned collection of conversations and teachings emphasizing the virtue and harmony within oneself and in society. Would fit seamlessly with Plato in offering a fascinating alternative viewpoint towards the pursuit of truth and peace.
- *Women, Race and Class* (Angela Davis): Study of the women's liberation movement. Important coverage of intersectionality and the role of race in the feminist movement. Would go well in conversation with De Beauvoir and other feminist texts in the curriculum.
- *The Wretched of the Earth* (Frantz Fanon): Analysis of the psychology of the colonized and their path to liberation. Themes of rage and frustration, violence, and revolution. Would be excellent to contrast with Nietzsche.
- *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Hannah Arendt): Captivating report on the trial of German Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann. Explores the banality of evil, moral obligation, and legitimacy of government. Would go well with *Man's Search for Meaning*.

## Social Studies

Social studies classes are often the primary exposure that students get to history during their busy high school lives. Therefore, it is imperative that students receive a multifaceted and substantive education. This year, the New Trier Coalition for Diversity urges the Social Studies department to create an equity plan like that of the English department. It is important that the department reflect critically on inclusivity at the professional, instructional, and curricular levels. We would also like to begin discussions with the Social

Studies department on how it can take action moving forward, such as including more diverse primary sources and connecting issues like racism across time.

## Implementation Timeline

7/15	Publish first version of NTCD curriculum initiative and research plan.
7/16	Get approval from Dubravec on implementation plan and feedback on current initiative proposal. Try to assess the level of cooperation for the research plan.
7/17-7/23	Have meetings with department chairs for initiative revisions, finalization, and implementation timeline adjustment.
7/24	Arrange for a meeting with the administration for final approval of rollout.
7/25-8/30	Assist teachers in drafting curricula and materials for initiative's mandates.
8/30~	TBA

## Signatures

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