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Why High Schools Should Include World Literature into Their Curriculum

World literature by definition is simply literature from all around the world. In the context for my discussion I am using world literature as acclaimed works of literature that are translated into English for the study and enjoyment of English speaking people. I believe that world literature is beneficial to the High School curriculum as it gives students a global perspective and trains them to be stronger at reading and analyzing literature.

A reason to include world literature into the High School curriculum is to pair world literature titles with American Literature. This is a technique utilized by Brad Coltrane and it allows the students to form connections between the American and differing cultures. This allows for the blending of both forms of literature and allows for students to broaden their abilities in analyzing and forming links between different works (Coltrane 29). With using such a technique students would be able to better understand the world literature by being able to base it off of the American Literature they already understand. This would come from paring works that “share a common thematic link or central issue” (28). One example given by Coltrane is to pair a work by Frederick Douglass along with Nigerian literature (29). Both discuss the same central idea of the slave trade, though the student is given to varying looks upon the topic and two separate viewpoints. This technique of pairing of works is strongly applicable to high schools as there is much room for growth because of the abundance of world literature there is offered (32).
Another benefit of world literature is that it gives a direct link to totally different worlds. Huan Saussy disuses this abstract view of world literature as reading of a totally separate world similar to reading about another planet. World literature is non-canonical and because of this the literature has a lessened chance of being read (Huan 291). This gives world literature a more sacred feel and the information acquired more beneficial to the reader. Huan uses world literature as a means to travel to many cultures without actually leaving a fixed position. Reading world literature benefits a readers “literary taste” and this grows with each experience (Huan 291). This all combines to compel the argument that world literature is something that develops ones literary skills in totally new ways.

Global mindedness is a topic and ideal that is stressed upon the growing youth of our modern era and rightfully since a global mindset is important. Reading world literature beckons this mindset; reading world literature exposes students to the lifestyles and values of the cultures around them. “Literature serves as a bridge” (Qureshi 34) to insight in topics and genres unheard of to the average high school student. And correlates to the ideas mentioned before as world literature giving way to “unseen worlds”. Also world literature can have the beneficial aspect of eliminating stereotypes created by high school students and “foster openness” (Qureshi 35) to cultures that have been slandered or been given misconceived notions due to media or popular opinion. A global mindset is important not only for seeing our surrounding cultures but also to link what is happening in ones area around the world. Teacher James Reese states: “Through careful, guided inquiry and by linking disciplinary study to the world at large, we are preparing students to be well informed about sociopolitical issues around the globe, while still meeting curriculum requirements” (64). If one understands a worlds culture, then when reading, watching, or discussing that culture’s present issues they will be able to make conscious and
thought provoking statements and inquiry. One must have a background of information on the
country before properly knowing and understanding exactly what is happening there.

World literature itself isn’t a new topic that has just entered into the mainstream of
secondary schools, such ideas and grasps on its importance date back to the 1930’s. John Barnes
wrote in *The English Journal* in-depth on his suggested curriculum for high school students. In
this curriculum he overviews a school already offering a world literature course and goes into the
guidelines of the class including the objectives and goals of the course per each grade level
(735). If world literature was seen as important seventy years ago then now in our globally
minded modern era world literature should be even more of an importance.

I personally also have a connection and first hand experience with world literature, in
high school I was one of forty students offered the class through the IB program. Upon reading
so many translated works I learned things history books can’t tell you, I read *Broken April* by
Ismail Kadare and learned not only about the ongoing Albanian blood feuds but there direct
affect on each person involved physically and psychologically. I read *Chronicle of a Death
Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and learned for Hispanics how powerful family honor is to
there culture, powerful enough to kill a man over the taking of their sisters purity and ruining of
her marriage. That’s just two of the many works I read, all of which opened up my understanding
and challenged my abilities to analyze literature and then reiterate it to my classmates. Once I
found I could find themes, diction, literary elements, tone, point of view, and specific literary
devices in translated works I found I could easily do them in the normal American literature and
canonical works that my regular English class was reading.

To conclude, reading world literature is beneficial to high school students as it helps
teach them further how the read and analyze pieces of literature. This development arises from
the use of paired works and the reading and discussion of the world literature itself. Along with the heightened understanding of literature students are also expanding there global perspectives and learning about the cultures that surround them. These global perspectives will replace stereotypes of the cultures and assist in the further understanding of the countries read. World literature is a class sparsely given in select schools around the US and needs to be offered in every school and to any student who has the drive and abilities to take it.
Annotated Bibliography


This journal poses the question: “Is it possible to blend a curriculum that includes both world and American Literature” (28). And follows it up with a detailed analysis answering the question. It gives the pros and cons of using American vs World literature, and gives insight into the thoughts of the English teacher concerning such a decision. This source is important to my paper because it comes directly from an English teacher and was reviewed by other English teachers all acclaimed in their field. Further in the journal Coltrane discusses his own techniques of teaching both forms of literature by using paired works and allowing his students to form the connections between the American and differing cultures. This technique allows for the blending of both forms of literature and allows for students to broaden their abilities in analyzing and forming links between different works (29). The use of this technique and the examples of the books given will help me in my paper by giving me examples of specific world literature books that high school students can read and understand. Coltrane further explains that there is much room for growth because of the abundance of world literature there is offered (32).


This journal discusses the inclusion of world literature into the curriculum of secondary schools. This expresses some of the difficulties involved in the forming of world literature
classes, including the difficulty in acquiring suitable texts (734). This journal also offers a brief overview of how literature is generally taught in schools, and how it lacks differing forms of literature or national values. Further it overviews a school in which there is a world literature class in place and follows how the class is run. The source then goes into further depth by offering the guidelines of the course as to the grade level that each course is offered at and why the classes fall in such an order. Also along with these guidelines come the objectives and goals of the course per each grade level (735). This brings about the question: If such a class was effective and was offered in the 1930’s then why can’t more high schools over seventy years later have a similar course? Also the time period helps my argument that if world literature was important seventy years ago then in new globally concerned twenty first century world literature should be of even more importance. This source again comes from the English Journal and been written and reviewed by esteemed scholars who are accredited in the subject of literature and its topics.


This journal engages the reader into an abstract look at literature, from the scope of a world view, creating the idea of world literature. This journal looks into how we see world literature and explains how world literature benefits the reader’s “literary taste” with experience, and such experience is gained through reading world literature (290). The source then discusses how world literature is non-canonical and because of this the literature has a lessened chance of being read (291). It even takes a more abstract view at literature in a form of different worlds, in that there are an enormous amount of imaginative worlds that can be created and explored through the reading of world literature. I find this source important to
my paper in it directly addresses the importance of literature different than any other source I have acquired. Its sheer thought provoking out of this world context and thought, drive home the point that world literature is something that develops ones literary skills in totally new ways. The writer of this journal is from the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago, so they hold a recognizable position in an institution of higher learning. And such that there views and opinions can be recognized and are acceptable for my topic.


This is a reflection by a Muslim American high school English teacher who following 9/11 decided to have her students read more literature to expose them to the lifestyles and values of cultures around them. She did this with a program that integrated world literature into the classroom to help eliminate the stereotypes created by her students. She believes that “literature serves as a bridge” (34) to insight into topics and genres unheard of to the average high school student. Her whole view of world literature is to utilize it to “foster openness” (35) to cultures that have been given a slander or misconceived notions due to media or popular opinion. This will benefit my paper in that it gives a new argument for why world literature is needed in high school curriculum, not basing it on the literary merit of the works but more the cultured benefits of reading the works. Also I find this source important as it is more evidence of established and successful world literature class in a high school with documented course guidelines and curriculums. Again as in the other sources this comes
from a legitimate English teacher and was revised by a scholarly group that represents the English community.


This journal discusses the importance of teaching World Literature and how it is vital for every high school student. This writer hints toward the need to link what’s happening in one’s area to what’s happening around the world. As a teacher he directly states that “Through careful, guided inquiry and by linking disciplinary study to the world at large, we are preparing students to be well informed about sociopolitical issues around the globe, while still meeting curriculum requirements” (64). Then Reese further discusses the inclusion of the World Literature in the IB program (63). With experience in this program I know first hand the benefits of studying World Literature and I can assimilate this experience into my paper offering first hand experience of literature and teaching techniques used on high school students. This source will add more to showing how important World Literature is in schools.

This journal gives real examples of World Literature books that students can read and analyze. From these I can find real life themes and connections to use in my paper as examples to how World Literature and Literature are very similar and important to compare. This source just like all the other sources from the English Journal and is a reputable source.