

“literature as equipment for living”: teaching the texts of the 2010s

Tom Jesse
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Why don't students read assigned texts?

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**They don't have
time.**

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~~They don't have
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They don't have
interest.

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**I haven't given them
a good reason to.**

“Art forms like ‘tragedy’ or ‘comedy’ or ‘satire’ would be treated as **equipments for living** that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes. The **typical ingredients** of such forms would be sought. Their relation to **typical situations** would be stressed. Their comparative values would be considered, with the intention of formulating a ‘**strategy of strategies,**’ the ‘over-all’ strategy obtained by **inspection of the lot.**”

Kenneth Burke, “Literature as Equipment for Living”

How do these texts represent, question, and/or intervene in contemporary culture?

What “equipments for living” do these texts offer readers living in the 2010s?

the books

Chronology = 2010-2012

Multiple genres: Novels // Short fiction // Poetry // Graphic novel

Multiple identities: Gender // Race // Age

Prize winners, Best sellers, “Buzz” generators

the assignments

Reading calendar emphasizes **shifting**

Long texts = **Selections // Jigsaw // Student Choice**

Weekly Presentations = **“Cultural Impact”** of themes & motifs in other popular media

Two essays: **CRA** (4-5 pp.) builds skills and confidence for **RBA** (6-8 pp.)

the feedback

“I thought this was going to be a boring, busy-work class but it was very different. Gained new perspective.”

“Seven books was a lot. [I] took a lot of time preparing for each class. [S]ometimes it was annoying to sit and read before the day of another big test.”

“Before this class I had never actually finished a book. Now I can say that I have finished 6!”

“Don't pick such depressing books.”

the lessons

Bring **cultural connections** into the classroom
even more often

Find texts with **humor & happiness**

Swap one **novel** for one book of **poetry**

Increased **modeling & explicit instruction** for
literary analysis essays

Why don't students read assigned texts?

They will.

**We simply have to find the right texts for
our courses, for our students.**

**And those texts are being written,
published, and sold in **the here and now.****

[Thank you.]