

ELA Teacher Work Session with Dr. Christina Dorr

8:00-9:15: Grade level teams completed CRE scorecards for their assigned units.

9:15-10:15: Discussion about literature facilitated by Dr. Christina Dorr

Summary of Group Discussions (Captures highlights; small group conversations more nuanced than what could be captured in notes.)

Who are the books for?

- Students
- Community/ board of Ed
- Personal pleasure
- State

What are we trying to teach?

- Reading skills
- Discussion, writing skills
- Thinking skills
- Life skills

Are these the best books/narratives to teach those things?

- For now, yes, but it changes. What is going on around us that may make the focus change or need for supplemental change?
- Yes because it is why I am prepared to teach today even if no.
- Adding additional options would make it better
- Yes if they build upon others

Do the books have meaning for and engage the intended audience?

- MS does surveys at end of each unit to gauge this.

Do we sometimes use books that don't satisfy the questions above? Why/why not?

- What is available or prepared
- Trial and error
- Canon - can be an ugly word but if we pair it with more related texts from diverse perspectives, can build upon classics

Perspectives

- Windows, mirrors, sliding glass doors to walk through and join the author (Rudine Bishop)
 - Are there mirrors present? Are the doors locked?
- Curtains (Debbie Reese) - when people of color or diverse groups might write now in a protective way to give a glimpse but still hide much of who they are (rituals, traditions) so it isn't exploited.

- Prisms (Una Krishnaswami) - books can disrupt perceptions about diversity through intersectionality, multifaceted identity
- Springboard for more conversation (Jason Reynolds)
- Starting block as a place to push back and move forward (Christina Dorr) - question motives, themes, ideas

How do you know when a book is the right piece of literature to share with students?

- Crave complexity
- Student enthusiasm and excitement
- Does the book stand up to analysis?

How do you know when a book is right to have available for students to choose on their own?

- Independent reading level

How do you know when a book is not the right fit for your students?

- Content too mature for middle school
- Community pushback/parent anger - how do you balance that?
- Teacher isn't comfortable teaching it

What is your measure of excellence in a piece of literature? What is your student's measure?

- Does the book make me intensely care about the character?

What is your philosophy of books?

- Teach book above their level
- Use independent and lit circles at their level