Brandon Sloane

Required Novels

Finalized- JW

It’s 9 P.M. on the Sunday night before the school year begins and you’re cooped up in your room frantically trying to finish the required book you were assigned to read over summer vacation; we’ve all been there. While procrastination and outright laziness have long been considered the reasons for students’ lack of desire to read these novels, there may be an entirely different reason: students just don’t enjoy reading them. Required reading has long been a prominent part of the American school system in which each year students will read a select group of books that have been noted for having some sort of historical significance or major cultural impact. Due to their enormous recognition, these books have been made a requirement for all students to read each year. However as years pass, more students have lost interest in reading these books with each passing year. So we have to ask ourselves: Are these “classic” novels really all they’re cracked up to be?

Most teachers believe novels with great reputations, such as *Catcher in the Rye, The adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and Animal Farm* will touch the hearts of everyone who reads them and mystify them in the same way that they did back when the books were first published. They hope students will get the same pleasure out of reading the novels that they did the first time they perused through the pages. What they fail to realize is just because the book has had a great track record in the past, doesn’t mean that it will go over well with students in the present day.

One major reason for the lack of student desire to read these books is the lack of historical relevance the books convey to today’s students. For example, the book *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck is the story of George and Lenny, two friends and their struggle to get the life they’ve always wanted during the harsh times of the great depression. While generally regarded as one of the immortal tales of its age, many of today’s students have not received the book nearly as well as previous students did. This is probably because the action takes place 70 years before most of us were even born. Students as a whole will have an easier time getting interested in the book they are reading when it has some personal relevance to them. One way for teachers to combat this problem would be to relate the stories to current events that are occurring now. Because reality is, how many people today are having experiencing the same financial troubles that plagued to George and Lenny during the great depression? The more the reader is able to empathize with the character, the better he can analyze the themes conveyed in the book.

The timeliness of the novels on the required reading is another characteristic that makes them complex for the students to read. As you may know, language is constantly changing and always adding new words and phrases depending on the era. So when students read novels whose dialect is from the 1600’s, the students lose their ability to fully comprehend what they are reading.. *Great expectations* by Charles Dickens is a prime example of this. This eternal story follows the growth and development of an orphan named Pip and his life experiences. Unfortunately for us, the book uses old English speak which has become antiquated in today’s world. Therefore the story behind this great book is not completely understood and appreciated. While it is a classic tale, the language barriers make it much harder for people to indulge in it and students end up resorting to using sparknotes to analyze the book.

The required reading list is chock full of archaic books and is in desperate need of a face-lift. Fortunately, many English teachers at our school are already taking steps to implement more current books to their reading lists. *The story of B, The Hunger Games, Ghetto Nation* are just a few examples of modern books being used in classrooms to analyze literature. These books not only exemplify great writing, but they have had the same cultural impacts that books like *Of mice and Men* and *To kill a mockingbird* had in the past. Although the list is most likely not going to change anytime soon, one thing our teachers need to realize is just because a book has a good reputation, doesn’t always mean it is a good read.