Research and Defense of a Particular Canon Project

The term literary canon refers to a body of books, narratives, and other texts considered to be the most important and influential of a particular time period or place.

For instance, you’ve read many works from the Western Canon in your education thus far. They include *The Great Gatsby*, *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Antigone*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Odyssey*, *MacBeth*, *The Scarlett Letter*, etc.

Some of you have commented that you feel you’ve read the work of “a lot of dead white men.” It is true that there are authors’ perspectives that are left almost entirely out of these bodies of work. Reading a more traditional canon is sometimes thought to better prepare students for standardized tests or coursework at the next level. You may find a lot of value in what you have read so far, but you might also come across authors and texts that you feel strongly would be of equal value to you in your reading. Your job will be to research some of the works of a more traditional canon, both those you’ve read and haven’t. You will also research the syllabi, where available, for different undergraduate, graduate, or public or private school courses. You might find one from the college or university you plan to enroll in. Read book reviews; try the *Boston Globe* or *New York Times*, and The Literature Resource Center, a literary database you can access at school. You’ll have a Research Guide to help you. What are others reading? What different perspectives make up their “canon” or body of works? Interview a friend, sibling, college student, English major you know. Is there a work that has been significant and impactful in their experience or education. Ms. Pronovost is an excellent resource; what has she been reading and why? Ask for her opinion. Do you find a school who’s reading more Asian or Latina or Queer contemporary authors for example? Research some of these titles. Can you tell why they’d be of value for students to be reading and working with?

Your product: Develop your own “canon,” your own list of works from any authors, time periods, or places that you feel every high school or college freshman should read. Could you make a canon that is more inclusive of the experiences of different groups of people? Examine the history of award winning works of literature that may have received honors such as The Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, The National Book Award, The Booker Prize. Have trends in these awards changed at all? Make a list of 15-20 titles and authors including a brief description with each one that defends its inclusion on your list.