



Textual Lineage

Create your textual lineage (Tatum, 2008) to share the impact of reading on your identity and life, which serves as a model for students to create their own textual lineage.

* WHY

Many striving readers simply don't see the value in reading. We share our textual lineage—our own literate lives—with them so they can see the impact reading has had on us and the potential it has to transform them. We present a variety of genres and text types—books, magazines, essays, comics, graphic novels—so strivers get the message that, as literacy advocate and former principal Shelley Harwayne says, reading “widely and wildly” can change us. We want striving readers to understand that, in many ways, we are what we read!

* WHEN

Creating a textual lineage takes time. In fact, it is a never-ending process. We often begin the exercise during the summer or on the weekends, when we have time to seriously consider what to include. Early in the year, before we introduce our textual lineage, we share with students one important book that has influenced us and explain why. Later in the fall, we share our textual lineage over several days (see page 57). Then, whenever we read a book that has a major impact on us, we let kids know it (“*Wow I just read a book that really changed me, let me tell you about it . . .*”) and add it to our textual lineage.

* HOW

To build community and common understanding, we share our textual lineage in the whole-class meeting space. If we have access to all the texts that we have included, we bring them in. Holding them up, paging through them, and sharing the stories behind them has a big impact on striving readers, particularly if some of the books are from our childhood. If we don't have copies of the books, we share images of the covers.

Here’s a transcript of Steph sharing her childhood textual lineage:

A Hole Is to Dig by Ruth Krauss is the first book I remember. I scribbled on it with purple crayon, and my mom scolded me. But I was trying to replicate writing, probably my first recognition that the words we read represent the language we speak. And there is a line in the book that says, “. . . mashed potatoes are so everybody has enough.” Being one of five kids, I can relate, and I still love mashed potatoes!

The Sailor Dog by Margaret Wise Brown begins, “Born at sea in the teeth of a gale the sailor was a dog.” I loved that lead so much; all I wanted to do was sail around the world with Scuppers. I loved the people he met in his travels and their exotic clothes. This book is probably one of the reasons I love adventure travel to this very day.

“If I ran the zoo,” said young Gerald McGrew, “I’d make a few changes, that’s what I’d do.” My husband says Dr. Seuss’s *If I Ran the Zoo* represents the control freak in me, always wanting to take control and change things. Who knows? Could be.

The Nancy Drew books were the only books I read growing up where girls could do the kinds of hair-raising, adventurous things normally reserved for boys. I was mesmerized by Nancy’s confidence, skill, and power. I loved every book in the series and was forever drawn to series books because of her.

Classic Illustrated Comics made me a reader. They cost 15 cents, and I got an allowance of 25 cents a week, so I bought one every week and had ten cents left over for candy. I now collect them on eBay. They tell classic stories, swashbuckling adventures, and fairy tales in graphic form. I knew all of Shakespeare’s plays before having read them in their original form. I had tons of background knowledge for classic novels because I read them as comics, and the stories were and are amazing.



The next step is for our students to create their own textual lineages, keeping in mind that striving readers may not have the history of texts necessary to do that. Often they have not had the rich reading experiences that thriving readers have. So we read aloud many books early in the year, which might give strivers some possibilities for their own lineage. We also search for books at their level on topics they’re interested in and care about, and invite them to read those books, and decide whether to include any of them in their lineage.

