

Cultivate the Genius in Your Students at Home With a Textual Lineage Tree

Think of a “textual lineage,” first presented by Alfred Tatum in 2013, as a reading and writing autobiography that reveals who we are—in part, shaped through the stories and information we’ve read and experienced. When students create a visual representation of the texts that are important in their lives, they begin to see how their textual lineage is part of their multi-faceted identity. Creating a textual lineage can help students:

- **Value family and cultural influences.** They understand that the texts they have shared at home, with family and friends, and in community arenas such as places of worship or civic gatherings also reflect their literate lives.
- **Understand that everyone has a unique mosaic of textual influence.** Seeing the work of others makes us aware of the complex humanity of our peers and colleagues and also helps us see points of connection among us all.
- **Honor different types of texts and ways of reading.** Students may be surprised to discover how many types of texts they, their families, and peers interact with every day.

A textual identity tree is a rewarding end-of-year representation of students’ reading lives. The tree captures students’ relationships to books and other texts, promotes book talks and sharing among peers—and may lead to a discussion of summer reading plans with students. Use this engagement with books as an entry point into a lesson about the history of libraries and library access or as a way to explore the many types of texts in our lives (e.g., digital and print). Inevitably, your students will notice the ways in which texts are embedded in our lives and how they can shape the people we are.

Here are some ways to help students explore and share their identity work, no matter the degree of technology access they have:

Teaching students who have a device of their own:

- Start by creating and sharing with your students your own textual lineage tree. You can create a collage of images and text in a digital slideshow, make a graphic organizer with basic drawing tools/app, or draw a free-form sketch. (Below, see an example of a tree organizer created in Microsoft Word, filled in with a student’s reading autobiography.) Ideas for ways to complete the template:
 - **Roots:** titles of any texts—from songs to movies to stories—that close family and friends shared. It might include the first book you remember hearing read to you.

- **Branches or leaves:** titles of any current texts that shape your life. You might use different spaces to represent different types of text (digital/print), text genres, or the places you engage with the text. For more detail, add the people who share the text experience.
- Pre-record or livestream a short presentation in which you invite students to think of their textual lineage as their “Family Tree of Books and Other Texts.” You might tell them: *These are the movies, books, poetry, stories and other texts that have shaped your thinking, understanding of yourself, and the world.*
- Share your own filled-in tree template and describe why the texts you chose are so important and why you organized your tree this way.
 - You might have older students consider the following questions before sending them off to make their tree. If students are not able to respond through chat in a livestream lesson or post their ideas to a sharing board after, encourage them to jot some ideas down while they are watching, and share them with a family member.
 - What makes a text a text—what do you read besides books? (Prompt them to think of digital and print examples.)
 - What are various ways that we can “read” information or ideas?
 - What are the types of texts you read most frequently?
 - What texts will you remember always? Why are these texts so important or meaningful to you?
 - You may want to list different text categories to help younger students fill in their Family Tree of Texts. These might include:
 - your first memory of songs, stories, and rhymes
 - movies you love
 - videos posted by family, friends, or people you are following
 - favorite books—picture and chapter books
 - funny or serious memes, websites, blog posts, etc.
 - memorable poetry, songs, and raps
- Work with students as they are filling in their trees. In a next session, you might have them partner on the digital platform and make note of what they learned about one another. As a journal prompt, you might use some of the following questions to encourage students to write more about their identities:
 - As you look at your Family Tree of Texts, what stories come to mind about yourself? Your family? Your friends? Your community?
 - What story does your Family Tree of Texts tell about you—and your language, culture, and interests?
 - How does this story help you understand yourself?

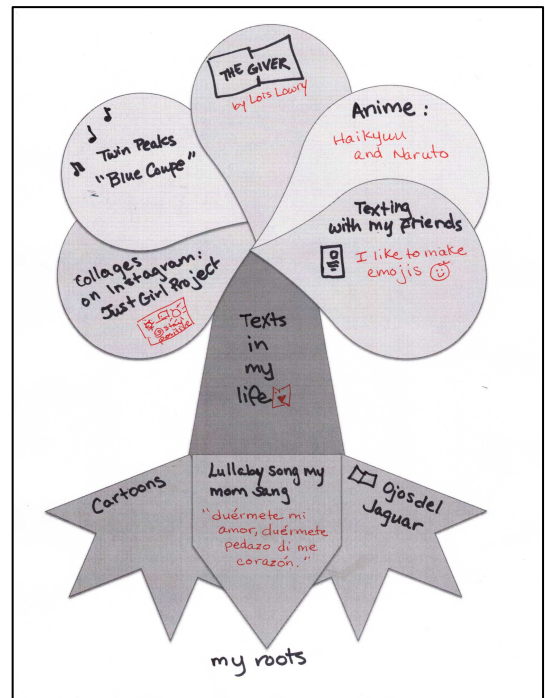
- What story might someone who doesn't know you— tell about you—as they look at your Family Tree of Texts?
- What new movies, books and other texts might you want to explore next?
- How might you use these new texts to change, expand, and grow your story?

Teaching students who share a device at home:

Follow the same steps and suggestions as above, using a pre-recorded presentation of your filled-in tree organizer and prompts for students to create their own. Keep in mind that students' reflections on their trees expand their understanding of their identities and their ability to relate to and learn from their peers. Use your digital learning platform, if possible, to invite students to share their work with a caption that summarizes their reflection.

Teaching students who may have limited or no online access:

If you are creating packets of materials to send home, consider sharing some easy directions for caregivers to help students create their textual lineage tree. Copying and sharing a tree organizer you've filled in will provide a model and also help your students and their families feel connected with you from a distance. Some additional notes include:



- Thank the caregiver for working with the student and explain how this engagement is a way for students to build their identity as readers of many kinds of texts—and to showcase the books, poems, songs, and other texts that have shaped their lives.
- If you haven't provided an organizer template, suggest that the caregiver work with the student to find paper and markers or crayons to make a basic tree shape with several roots, a trunk, and four to five branches.
- Provide age-appropriate guidance, adapting the prompts, questions, and suggested categories from above as needed.
- Suggest that if the caregiver can take a snapshot of the student's tree with their phone to share with you, you will use it to learn more about the student as a reader right now. Additionally, the tree will inform your summer and beyond reading suggestions. And finally, don't forget to mention to families what fun they will have discussing their own textual identity trees around the family dinner table!