

Understanding Ourselves and Others through Literature

LESSON/PROJECT

Book Clubs

SUBJECT

English Language Arts

GRADE(S)

9, 10



watch the video

In 9th and 10th grade English classes, students take part in book clubs that put them in charge of their own reading and learning process. They begin with a **“speed dating” style book selection**, previewing a range of titles and blurbs before choosing the book that speaks most to them, so that ownership starts from the very first decision. From there, students set their own reading schedules, deadlines, and tasks, **working with peers in their table group** while the teacher steps back into a supporting role, listening in and asking questions rather than directing the process.

Meaningful choice

As they read, students keep **dialectical journals, selecting passages and writing personal responses to them**, then bringing those reflections into

Constructive reflection

small-group discussions where they **trade perspectives and work through anything they didn't fully understand together**. The books themselves surface **big ideas around identity, cultural expectations, and lived experience**, and students consistently connect these themes back to their own lives: a student reflecting on family expectations, a student linking a character's experience of police brutality in the media to her own family's immigration story, another recognizing herself as a people-pleaser and pushing back against that instinct within the book club setting. Throughout the process, students describe real shifts in how they see themselves: gaining confidence as leaders, stepping outside their comfort zones, developing a

Meaningful voice and multiple perspectives

Anchored in big ideas

SEE IT IN ACTION: EXAMPLES FROM EDUCATORS

stronger sense of responsibility, and discovering an unexpected enjoyment of writing that some now pursue outside of class. The teacher frames the work as more than a reading exercise. Students are meeting reading and writing standards while analyzing text, synthesizing information, and communicating their comprehension, but they're doing it with intention and

heart, bringing their full selves into the process rather than reading at a distance. The project underscores a belief that every student's voice and experience matters, and that a classroom culture built on shared stories, regardless of who is loudest or quietest in the room, can help students better understand both themselves and each other.

Student Work

Final Reflections on *Patron Saints of Nothing* by Randy Ribay:

Book:	Personal connection 2:
In the book we learn about a boy named Jay. Jay gets told that his cousin Jun that lives in the Philippines died, and has a regret wishing he replied to the letters Jun sent him. After he doesn't get a clear description of what happened to Jun, that leads Jay to go over to the Philippines. Over there he talks to Jun's sister Grace after a long time. At first she kept to herself and didn't do much talking. After Jay gets to know her more, he understands that he isn't the only person that lost someone. Behind all the quiet Grace was going through the same pain and struggle as Jay maybe even worse, because holding in all the pain and pushing it away didn't help at all for Grace, almost just made things worse for her and how she felt.	I could also connect with Grace because keeping that in didn't help, just made things worse for me in my personal experience. I didn't want to bother others telling them, "I need help". I didn't know how to ask, and when I did want to ask I just thought it would bother them. They could be doing something much more important than listen and worry about what I'm going through. I thought I could just keep it in forever I never really thought anyone would notice or care. Untill my English teacher finally realized something was wrong. Finally someone help me take out how I feel. My english teacher helped me open up about what was wrong. Just like how Jay helped Grace to open up how she felt about losing her brother Jun.
Personal connection 1:	Why is it important:
I could connect to not only Grace but also Jay in some way. I found out that my father went missing in Mexico right before my 14 birthday. At that moment I wished I went to go see him more. Just like how Jay wished he wrote back to Jun. I could understand because I didn't take seeing my dad for advantage, and looking back I wish I had seen him one more time. The last memory of him that I had was when I was 8. It takes losing someone to realize what you really had, wishing you took the time with them for advantage. It really hurt knowing that you're not going to see the person who you were close with at some point. It really did hurt and still does.	It takes losing someone to realize what you had. I feel like that can be used not only from losing someone. Just losing something important can make you wish you can go back to having that person or thing, when it's already too late. I feel like we as people take things for advantage and are not fully thankful for what we get. This is a problem because when that thing or person is gone it just hurts you. It hurt me. It leaves you with a pain wishing you showed you cared. Keeping in your pain or struggle just stacks more things on top of it. It just makes things worse. If my teacher didn't check up on me, who knows if I would be the same. I just want to be the person my teacher was to me. Be there for others, let them talk to me about their problems. I want to do what my teacher did to me. I want to lead on kindness. That's what everyone needs in this world with many issues, a kind person who can be there for you.

Final Reflections on *Piecing Me Together* by Renée Watson:

While reading this book, I was able to connect most with the main character due to Jade's reaction to hearing about police brutality against a black girl her age. As someone who is Latina, I can connect with this because I've also felt fear, anger, and sadness hearing about the brutality federal agents have used against my community. Being able to connect with the events in the book has made me question why change hasn't happened and has inspired me to learn more about politics and issues surrounding our world.	This book explores belonging through the way your economic background, race, and intersectionality play a role in someone feeling of belonging. Personally, I've experienced feeling disconnected in spaces with people from different economic backgrounds than mine, rather than in those with similar ones. This is important because I'm not the only person who has felt like this, and it can really affect your self-esteem. Not to mention, lower your chances of being successful.	To "Escape" is to succeed is a message that means to leave your past behind to be more successful than your parents ever could. This message is really prevalent in both the book and in the real world. When you come from a background of struggle, so many expectations are placed on you. You are expected to do more, be more, and not be like the other that are stuck in the same cycle of struggle. These expectations can cause a lot of pressure and mostly affect minorities.	A problem the book addresses is the stereotyping of people of color. Stereotypes are still really prevalent in our world and are extremely harmful. As a result, it can cause people to become more ignorant of the struggles that minorities face, and can continue a cycle of ignorance and discriminatory behavior.
I am learning to speak. To give myself a way out. A way in.			