

The Magic of Historical Fiction

Using Banned Books to Help Students Connect
with History and Learn to Love Literature

Lindsay Woods
St. Charles Community College AEL
MAACCE June 2023

Agenda:

- Choosing a book
- Introducing the book to students
- Structure of class book club
- Ideas for incorporating history instruction
- Reading strategies & elements of literature
- The books I've used so far
- Tips & tricks
- Student feedback
- Let's hear from you! - questions, suggestions, strategies, and resource sharing

Choosing a book:

- My criteria:
 - Young Adult (YA)
 - Historical fiction
 - has been banned or challenged
- Young adult (YA) means the story is told from the perspective of a 10- to 18-year-old.
- Historical fiction means it's accurate to the time & place in which it is set, but the story and/or characters are made up.
- Banned or challenged means someone didn't want certain others to read this book and had enough time to make a fuss about it but not enough sense to realize that the fuss would help the book sell more copies.

Why young adult?

- * High interest, low reading level text allows almost anybody to access the content.
- * No pressure - We also want to teach our students how to **read for fun**.
- * We've ALL been that age - accommodate students aged 16 to 65
- * The main character may be young, but there are other characters in the book to whom our students can relate.

Why historical fiction?

“Reading history allows us to understand what happened.
Reading historical fiction allows us to *be moved* by what happened.
Even after we know the facts, we continue to search for sense and
meaning. That is the essence of our humanity.”

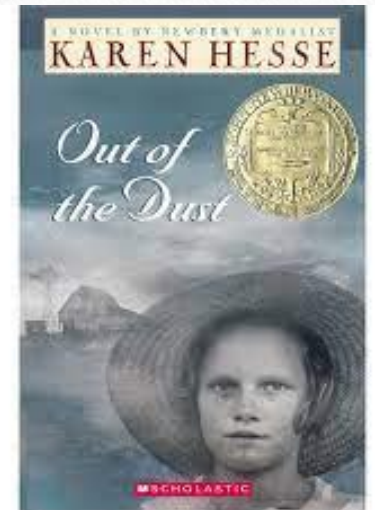
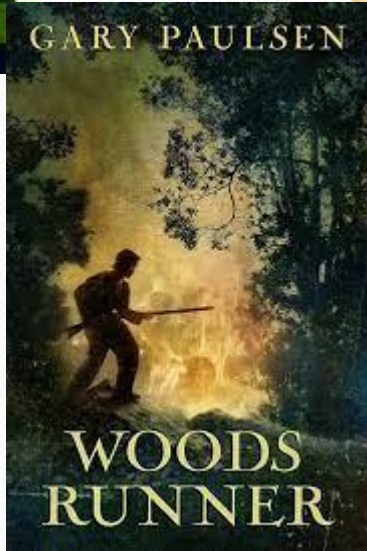
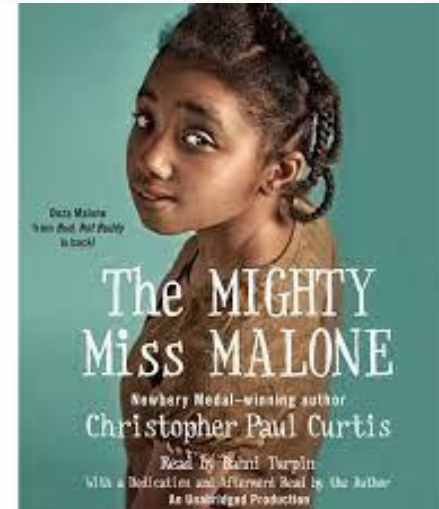
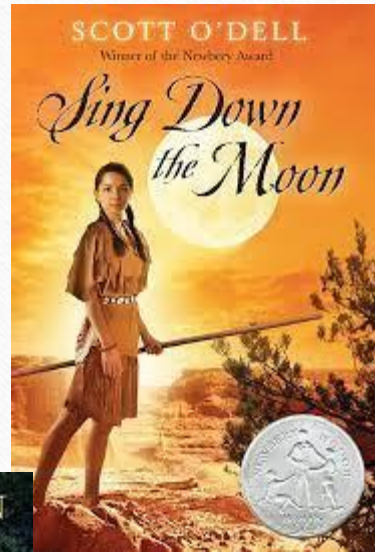
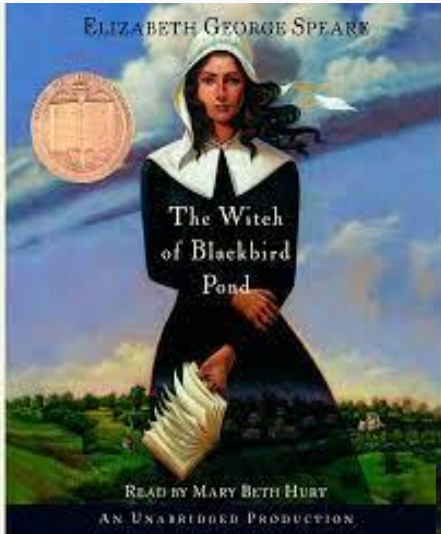
-- **Linda Kass**

And because learning about history is boring but reading stories is
fun! 😊

Why banned books?

Uh, to stick it to the man, of course! 😊

Some Examples:



Introducing the book:

- Celebrate Banned Books Week!!!
 - Typically the last week in September
 - This year, it will be the first week in October.
- Oh, look! Here's a book on our shelf that was banned or challenged. What are the odds?
- Book talks: Get students excited, but be careful of spoiler alerts. Don't necessarily read the back of the book.
- Explain what historical fiction is.

How I structure Book Club:

- I want this to be relaxing and fun for my students.
- Only my volunteer tutor or I do the reading. Students are never called on!
- Students are given the choice between following along with their own copy or just sitting and listening. Most choose the latter.
- I encourage students who are artists or natural notetakers to have a notebook handy in case they want to jot down a vocabulary word, question, reflection, or association, but I never require notetaking.

Incorporating history instruction

- Everyday Edits
- Growing timeline
- First Amendment

Reading Strategies: (for comprehension, not decoding)

- Before-, During-, and After-Reading Questions
- Before Reading: “What can you infer from the cover art?”, “What do you already know about this time period?”, “Are there any unfamiliar words in the title?”
- During Reading: “What prediction(s) can you make?”, “Which character do you relate to the most so far?”
- After Reading: “Was there a problem in the story you would have solved or reacted to differently?”, “What lesson(s) can be learned from the story?”, “Would you end the story differently? If so, how?”

Elements of Literature:

- Have students identify figurative language.
- This is a fun way to explore:
 - Setting
 - Theme
 - Tone
 - Author's purpose

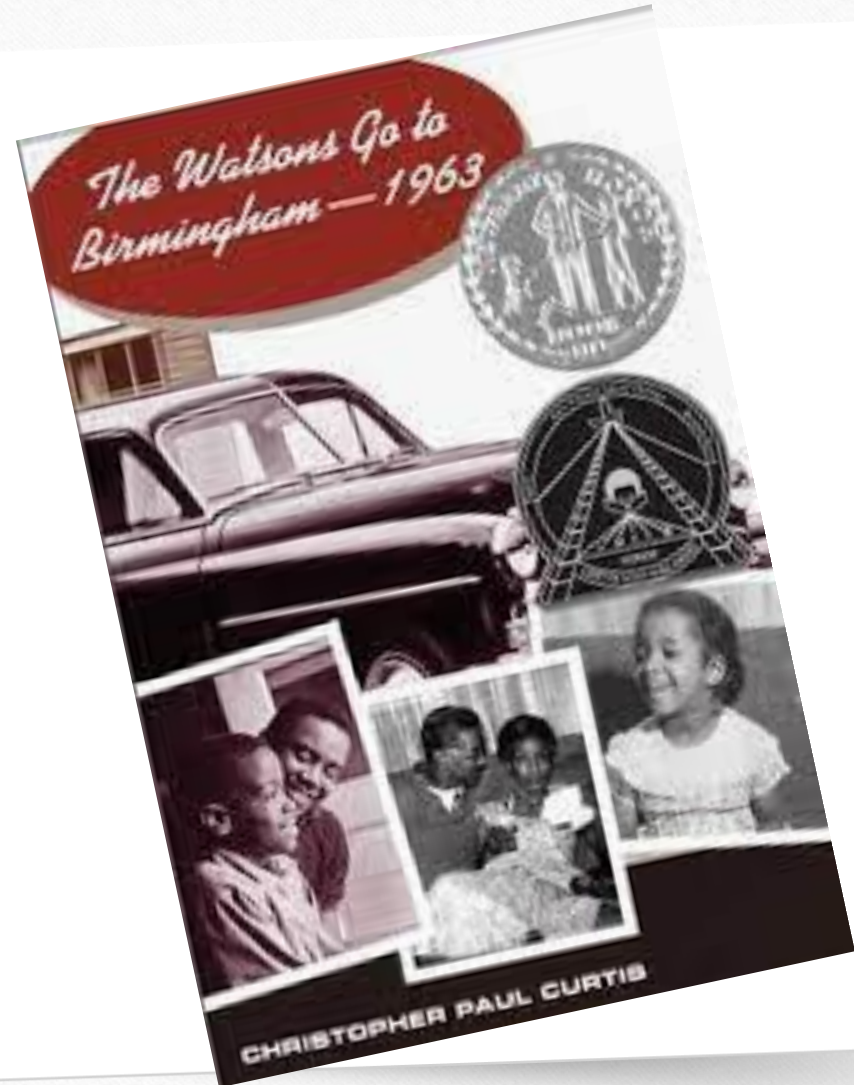
Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan

“The award-winning novel set in post-Revolutionary Mexico and Great Depression Era Southern California about 12-year old Esperanza Ortega has recently been challenged in Texas and North Carolina. One parent felt the novel ‘promoted illegal immigration’ and was not age appropriate, while other parents were upset that the book addressed issues like racism, immigration, and ‘ethnic class struggles,’ as though this were not, you know, what literature is *for*” (ACLU of Texas, 2015).



The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis

“Published in 1995, this book follows 10-year-old Kenny and his family on their vacation from Flint, Michigan to Birmingham, Alabama—just when violence is about to sweep over Birmingham. This book calls attention to a dark time in American history, but it was officially challenged because of ‘offensive language’ (Keenan, Kathleen; bookriot.com; 2017).



Tips & Tricks:

- The audio of most books can be accessed on YouTube for free.
 - If a student is absent, I email them the audio of the pages we read.
- Vocabulary lists for almost any book can be found on www.vocablulary.com.
- Lots of books have been made into movies, which can be watched after the book is read.

Reactions from Students:

- “I’ve never liked a book before this one. Now I have a library card” - Elizabeth M.
- Several students read the book to their kids.
- Several students did side research projects on the era, event, or author.
- Several students complained in the middle of the book (boring, depressing, intense), but all thanked me for making them push through to the end.
- Almost all my students were extremely interested in why the book was banned!

Let's Hear From You!



- Write down
 - Your name
 - 1 question or suggestion



- Trade with your neighbor or ball up your paper and throw it across the room.



- One at a time, read what's on the paper you have.