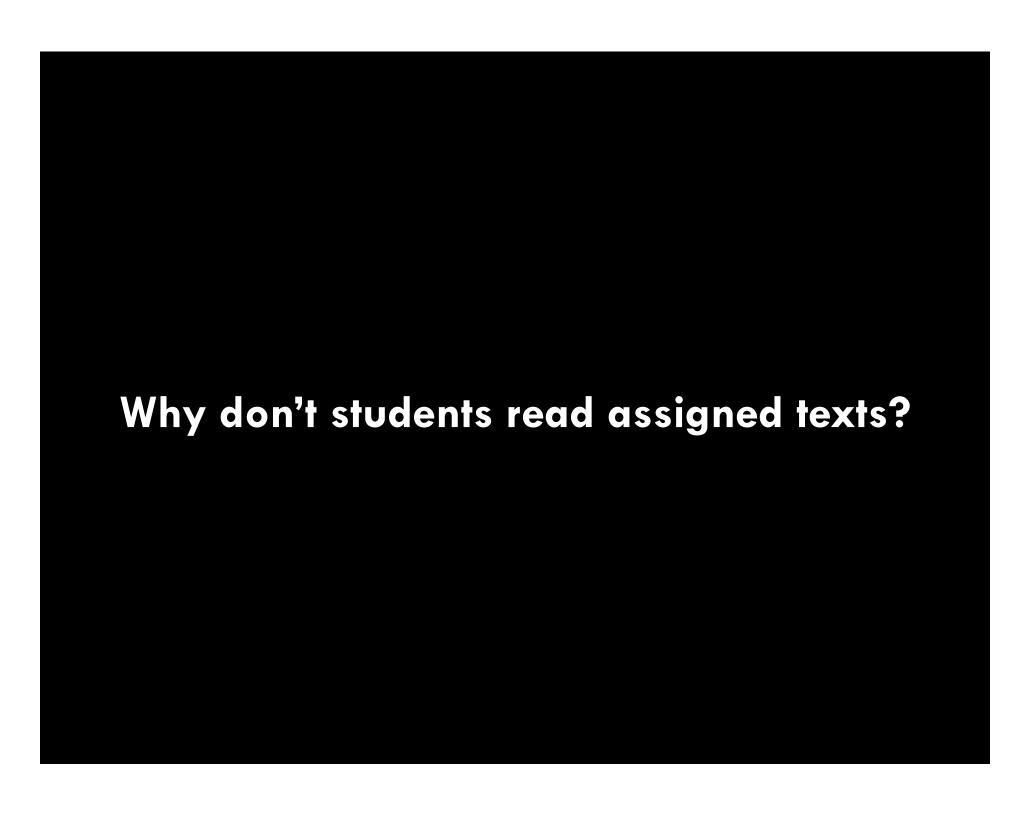
"literature as equipment for living": teaching the texts of the 2010s

Tom Jesse Society for Contemporary Literature Teaching Roundtable May 23, 2014



Why don't students read assigned texts?

They don't have time.

Why don't students read assigned texts?

They don't have

They don't have interest.

Why don't students read assigned texts?

They don't have

They don't have interest.

I haven't given them a good reason to.

"Art forms like 'tragedy' or 'comedy' or 'satire' would be treated as equipments for living that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes. The typical ingredients of such forms would be sought. Their relation to typical situations would be stressed. Their comparative values would be considered, with the intention of formulating a 'strategy of strategies,' the 'over-all' strategy obtained by inspection of the lot."

Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living"

How do these texts represent, question, and/or intervene in contemporary culture?

What "equipments for living" do these texts offer readers living in the 2010s?

the books

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Chronology = 2010-2012
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Multiple genres: Novels // Short fiction // Poetry // Graphic novel
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Multiple identities: Gender // Race // Age

Prize winners, Best sellers, "Buzz" generators

the assignments

Reading calendar emphasizes shifting

Long texts = Selections // Jigsaw // Student Choice

Weekly Presentations = "Cultural Impact" of themes & motifs in other popular media

Two essays: CRA (4-5 pp.) builds skills and confidence for RBA (6-8 pp.)

the feedback

"I thought this was going to be a boring, busy-work class but it was very different. Gained new perspective."

"Seven books was a lot. [I] took a lot of time preparing for each class. [S]ometimes it was annoying to sit and read before the day of another big test."

"Before this class I had never actually finished a book. Now I can say that I have finished 6!"

"Don't pick such depressing books."

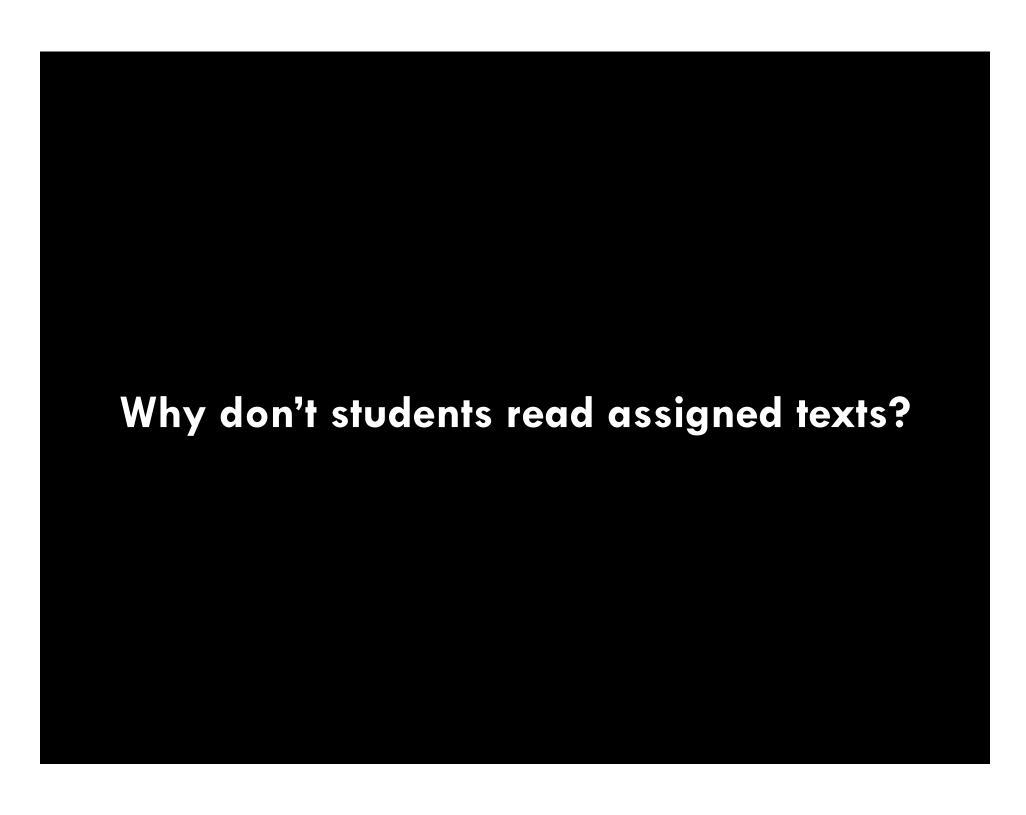
the lessons

Bring cultural connections into the classroom even more often

Find texts with humor & happiness

Swap one novel for one book of poetry

Increased modeling & explicit instruction for literary analysis essays



They will.

We simply have to find the right texts for our courses, for our students.

And those texts are being written, published, and sold in the here and now.